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- Gun reform recommended in Australia
- Iran's supreme leader says it will protect its nuclear, missile capabilities
- India's IT is 'Information Technology', Pak's is 'International Terrorism': Rajnath
- Defence firms pitch for developing more indigenous tech, systems



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## Zubeen case: Shyamkanu's bail plea rejected

### There is a risk of fleeing if he (Shyamkanu) is granted bail: Court



**GUWAHATI, April 30:** A special court in Assam on Thursday rejected the bail petition of Shyamkanu Mahanta, prime accused in the singer Zubeen Garg's death case, as there is a "risk of fleeing".

After hearing arguments from both sides, the Special Fast-track Court Judge Sharmila Bhuyan denied bail to Mahanta, the chief organiser of the North East India Festival in Singapore.

Garg died in Singapore on September 19 last year while swimming in the sea. The 52-year-old singer had gone to the Southeast Asian nation to perform in the 4th edition of the

festival.

"The court observed that his (Mahanta's) post-incident conduct was bad. Instead of helping Zubeen Garg, he had left for Malaysia, and he was called back with a lookout notice. So, there is a risk of fleeing if he is granted bail," Public Prosecutor Ziaul Kamar told reporters outside the court premises.

Mahanta applied for bail in the court on April 10.

The prosecution made its arguments based on the materials submitted by the investigators, Kamar added.

"The court examined those thoroughly. Ac-

cordingly, his bail was rejected. We are happy with the order," he said.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said in the state Assembly in November last year that Garg's death was a case of "plain and simple murder".

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of Assam Police's CID probed into the death and filed its charge sheet before a local court here in December, naming seven accused. Four of them are facing murder charges.

Shyamkanu is the younger brother of former DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta.

Gauhati University's VC Nani Gopal Mahanta, who was the Education Advisor to CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, is another elder brother of him.

Mahanta, the singer's manager Siddharth Sharma, his two band members Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amrit Prabha Mahanta, his cousin and Assam Police DSP Sandipan Garg, and his PSOs Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya are in jail as accused in the case.

Kamar said, "Shyamkanu and Siddharth will submit their written arguments on Saturday. The order for Siddharth's bail application will also be pronounced on that day."

He further stated that the charge framing process is now complete.

The Singapore Police Force also investigated the case and concluded that there was no evidence of foul play.

A Coroner's Court in Singapore had also said that the popular Indian singer-songwriter was severely intoxicated and had drowned off Lazarus Island after declining a life jacket. (PTI)

## SC reserves order on anticipatory bail of Pawan Khera

### Assam CM likened to 'constitutional Rambo'



**NEW DELHI, April 30:** Senior Congress leader Pawan Khera on Wednesday likened Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to a "constitutional cowboy or a Rambo" in the Supreme Court for his alleged remarks against him in relation to a criminal case.

The top court reserved the verdict on the anticipatory bail of Khera in the criminal case which

was registered against him for alleging that Sarma's wife possessed multiple passports and undisclosed offshore properties.

A bench of justices JK Maheshwari and AS Chandurkar, hearing a plea of Khera challenging the Gauhati High Court verdict dismissing his pre-arrest bail petition, was told by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi that the chief min-

ister has been making several objectionable remarks against the Congress leader.

Referring to alleged intemperate remarks of Sarma, Singhvi apprehended that Khera will not get fair treatment if allowed to be arrested in the case.

"Dr BR Ambedkar would turn in his grave if he had imagined that a constitutional office holder would speak like a constitutional cowboy or a constitutional Rambo," Singhvi submitted.

He termed the case as "unprecedented" as certain "unprintable" statements were made by the "boss of the boss of the boss of the prosecutor" while referring to the Assam chief minister.

Singhvi said that Sarma has threatened that Khera will spend the rest of his life in an Assam jail even when the core of the case is allegations of defamation and reputational damage. "Let me assume I am (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Mizoram declared 'insurgency-free' as last militant group lays down arms

**AIZAWL, April 30:** The last remaining ethnic insurgent group of Mizoram laid down arms on Thursday, and the state became "insurgency-free", Chief Minister Lalduhoma said.

Although it remained dormant for several years, a faction of the Hmar People's Convention (Democratic) or HPC(D), headed by Lalmhingthanga Sanate, indulged in sporadic criminal activities at irregular intervals, officials said.

The Sanate faction was considered the last surviving insurgent group in the northeastern state.

The HPC(D) had been demanding an autonomous district council for the Hmar community people under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

A total of 43 cadres of the group, including Sanate, surrendered their weapons to the government during a "homecoming and arms laying ceremony" at Sesawng near Aizawl during the day.

The 'homecoming ceremony' follows the peace accord signed



between the Mizoram government and the HPC(D) on April 14, effectively marking the end of insurgency in the state.

Speaking at the event, Lalduhoma said that the shadow of HPC(D) insurgency remained in mind whenever peace was spoken of in Mizoram in the past.

"We approached negotiations with an open heart to reach an

agreement. Our home minister and his colleagues worked tirelessly. Today, we have reached our goal. Now, with a peaceful heart, we can proudly say Mizoram is a truly peaceful state," the Chief Minister said.

Urging various Mizo tribes to reunite, Lalduhoma emphasised that no single tribe stands above the identity (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Governor interacts with IAS probationers



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, April 30:** Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Thursday interacted with five IAS probationers of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre at Lok Bhavan, urging them to prioritise citizen-centric governance and uphold the highest standards of public service.

The probationary officers called on the Governor as part of their orientation programme.

Congratulating them on joining the civil services, he emphasised the responsibility of ensuring that government schemes reach the most vulnerable sections of society effectively.

Highlighting the importance of ethical governance, the Governor stressed integrity, transparency and accountability as core values for administrators.

He encouraged the young officers to adopt the principle of "Reform, Perform, Transform" and to bring innovation and efficiency into governance systems.

He also underlined the growing role of technology in administration, noting that digital governance and emerging tools can significantly enhance transparency, responsiveness and service delivery.

Among those present during the interaction were Commissioner & Secretary to the Governor S.S. Meenakshi Sundaram, OSD to the Governor (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## ICSE, ISC Results

### Girls outperform boys, pass rate over 99%

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations on Thursday declared the Class 10 and Class 12 results for 2026, with overall pass percentages of 99.18 per cent and 99.13 per cent, respectively.

A total of 2,58,721 candidates appeared for the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), or Class 10, examination.

About 1,03,316 students took

the Indian School Certificate (ISC), or Class 12, exam.

Girls outperformed boys in both examinations.

In ICSE, girls recorded a pass percentage of 99.46 per cent compared to 98.93 per cent for boys. In ISC, girls achieved a 99.48 per cent pass percentage, while those of boys stood at 98.81 per cent.

In the ICSE exam, 2,56,590 candidates qualified, while 2,131 did

not clear the exam.

In the ISC exam, 1,02,414 candidates qualified, while 902 did not.

Category-wise, in ICSE, general category students recorded a pass percentage of 99.26 per cent, followed by Other Backward Classes (99.24 per cent), Scheduled Tribes (98.07 per cent) and Scheduled Castes (98.76 per cent). In ISC, general (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Exit poll predicts big BJP win in Bengal, Assam; return of DMK in TN, dead heat in Kerala

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** A new exit poll on Thursday predicted that the BJP would win big in West Bengal and Assam, while the DMK would return to power in Tamil Nadu.

The Today's Chanakya poll also predicted a tight race in Kerala, forecasting 69 seats for the Congress-led UDF and 64 seats for the ruling LDF with a margin of error of nine seats.

Another exit poll by News18 for West Bengal, predicted a close fight with the BJP getting 143-163 seats and the TMC 127-147 seats.

Today's Chanakya forecast 192 seats for the BJP and 100 for the TMC in West Bengal with a margin of error of 11 seats. West Bengal has a total of 294 seats with the majority mark being 148.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, however, asserted that her party would win more than 226 seats and alleged that the exit poll projections were aired at the "instruction of the BJP" to demoralise TMC workers.

In Assam, Today's Chanakya forecast that the BJP would get 102 seats and the Congress 23 with a margin of error of nine seats. The Assam assembly has 126 seats with the magic mark being 64.

Today's Chanakya predicted that the DMK would return to power in Tamil Nadu but actor-turned-politician Vijay's TVK would have a stunning poll debut, beating AIADMK, to the second spot.

It predicted that the DMK plus would get 125 seats,

TVK 63 seats and AIADMK plus 45 seats with a margin of error of 11 seats. The Tamil Nadu has a total of 234 seats with the magic mark being 118.

In Kerala, Today's Chanakya predicted a close contest, forecasting 69 seats (plus/minus nine seats) for the UDF, 64 seats (plus/minus nine seats) for the LDF and 7 seats (plus/minus four) for the BJP. Kerala assembly has 140 seats with the magic mark being 71.

Several exit polls on Wednesday predicted a thumping victory for the BJP in Assam and a clear edge for the party over the ruling TMC in West Bengal, while projecting a return of the DMK government in Tamil Nadu and a comeback by the Congress-led UDF in Kerala after 10 years.

However, some pollsters predicted a big win for the TMC in West Bengal and a hung House in Tamil Nadu with actor-turned politician Vijay's TVK emerging as a spoiler for the DMK.

Almost all forecast a return to power for the AIINR-led NDA government in Puducherry.

Most exit polls have had a chequered history and have been off the mark on several occasions in the past. Most exit polls do not spell out the methodology they have followed in arriving at their respective conclusions.

Axis My India on Thursday decided not to release its exit poll for West Bengal, saying it did not have enough data with many people not divulging their voting preferences. The counting (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## SC orders forensic test of audio clip linking ex-CM Biren Singh to Manipur violence

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** The Supreme Court on Thursday directed for an examination of an audio clip allegedly linking former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh to the ethnic violence in the northeastern state by the National Forensic Sciences University in Gujarat.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kumar and K Vinod Chandran issued the direction after advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioner, 'Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust', an NGO, argued that they were placing on record the complete audio clip, which was more than two hours long.

The bench directed the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) to analyse the recording and compare the voice sample in it with the admitted voice samples of Singh.

It said, "Prashant Bhushan,



counsel for the petitioner, states that the full audio clip of two hours and 36 minutes has been copied onto a pen drive from the original device. The said pen drive, being the first copy of the original, shall be furnished to the other side, to be forwarded to the NFSU for com-

parison with the admitted voice recordings of the individual concerned."

On January 7, the top court ordered a forensic examination of a 48-minute audio recording, which, the NGO alleged, pointed to the role of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Recovered artefacts linked to trafficking networks, including Subhash Kapoor case

### US returns 657 stolen antiquities worth \$14 million to India

**NEW YORK, April 30:** The US has returned 657 antiquities collectively valued at nearly USD 14 million to India, saying there is "more work to be done" to return stolen artifacts to the country.

The return was announced by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg on Tuesday.

The pieces were recovered following several investigations into trafficking networks, including those related to disgraced art dealer Subhash Kapoor and convicted trafficker Nancy Wiener.

The pieces were returned at an event attended by Consul Rajlakshmi Kadam from the Consulate General of India in New York.

"The scale of the trafficking networks that targeted cultural heritage in India is massive, as demonstrated by the return of more than 600 pieces today," Bragg said in a statement. "There is unfortu-



nately more work to be done to return stolen artifacts back to India, and I thank our team for their persistent efforts."

Consul General of India in New York, Binaya Pradhan, appreciated the sustained cooperation of the Manhattan District Attorney's Of-

fice, the US Department of Homeland Security, and the law enforcement agencies whose "continued vigilance," he said, "made the recovery and return of these culturally significant artifacts possible."

The items returned include a two million dollar bronze figure of

'Avalokiteshvara', seated on a inscribed double-lotus base over a lion-flanked throne.

The inscription identifies the craftsman as Dronaditya of Sipur, located near modern-day Raipur in Chhattisgarh.

The Avalokiteshvara was one of a large hoard of bronzes discovered near the Lakshmana Temple in 1939 and entered the collection of the Mahant Ghasidas Memorial Museum, Raipur in 1952.

The statue was stolen from the museum and smuggled into the US by 1982, ultimately ending up in a private collection in New York by 2014. The bronze artifact was located and seized from that collection by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office in 2025.

A sandstone figure of a dancing 'Ganesha', which was looted by one of Kapoor's indicted co-conspirators (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Sensex closes lower by 582 pts as high crude oil prices dent investor sentiment

**MUMBAI, April 30:** Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed nearly 1 per cent lower on Thursday as crude oil prices, weak global trends and foreign fund outflows weighed on investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 582.86 points or 0.75 per cent to settle at 76,913.50. During the day, it plunged 1,237.5 points, or 1.59 per cent, to 76,258.86, but recovered some of the losses in the second half of the session.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dived 180.10 points or 0.74 per cent to end at 23,977.55.

Among the 30-Sensex firms, Eternal, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Steel, Larsen & Toubro, UltraTech Cement and Mahindra & Mahindra were the major laggards.

Sun Pharma, Infosys, Bajaj Finance and Adani Ports were among the gainers.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 1.52 per cent lower at USD 116.2 per barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,468.42 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Indian markets closed a volatile session with a clear shift in intra-day sentiment, where early panic selling was gradually absorbed, leading to a disciplined recovery from the lows. The Nifty-50 opened with a sharp gap down near the crucial 24,000 support, reflecting weak global cues and a risk-off undertone.

"Escalating geopolitical tensions



in West Asia and Brent crude surging above USD 120 triggered concerns around inflation, currency stability, and margin pressures. This was further aggravated by the rupee hitting record lows, accelerating FII outflows and weakening overall sentiment," Hariprasad K, Research Analyst and Founder, Livelong Wealth, said.

However, the second half marked a notable turnaround, he said.

In broader markets, the BSE MidCap Select index dropped 0.84 per cent and the BSE SmallCap Select index declined 0.58 per cent. Among sectoral indices, metal tanked the most by 2.13 per cent, followed by PSU Bank (1.66 per cent), Realty (1.44 per cent), Commodities (1.36 per cent), FMCG (1.13 per cent), Financial Services (1.08 per cent) and Industrials (1.05

per cent).

"The decline was primarily driven by a sharp surge in crude oil prices, which spiked to multi-year highs amid escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and concerns over supply disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz.

"This raised fears of inflationary pressures and macroeconomic instability for oil-importing economies like India. Weak global cues, a sharp depreciation in the rupee to record low levels, and continued foreign institutional outflows further weighed on sentiment," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. Information Technology, Telecommunication and Focused IT were the winners.

"The rise in oil prices, along with persistent FII outflows and weak global cues, led to broad-based

weakness across sectors. However, the market witnessed a partial recovery in the latter half, supported by value buying at lower levels and selective institutional participation," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said. A total of 2,532 stocks declined, while 1,649 advanced and 156 remained unchanged on the BSE. In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended over 1 per cent lower, while Shanghai's SSE Composite index settled marginally higher.

Markets in Europe were trading mixed. US markets ended mostly lower on Wednesday.

"Brent crude crossed the USD 120 per barrel mark for the first time in four years, intensifying inflation concerns and pressuring global risk assets. In India, rising oil prices weighed on the INR and revived worries about capital outflows and widening deficits, given the economy's heavy reliance on crude imports.

"The Fed kept rates unchanged but maintained a firm policy stance, supporting the dollar and tightening conditions for emerging markets. Domestically, autos, banks, metals, and real estate led the decline, while IT and pharma saw selective defensive buying," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Stock and forex markets will remain closed on Friday for Maharashtra Day. (PTI)

## Gold rebounds ₹ 2,000 to ₹ 1.54 lakh/10g on weak US dollar

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** Gold prices rebounded by ₹ 2,000 to ₹ 1.54 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday, tracking firm trends in global markets and a weak US dollar.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity jumped ₹ 2,000, or 1.31 per cent, to ₹ 1,54,800 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). It had closed at ₹ 1,52,800 per 10 grams in the previous session.

"Gold rebounded from a one-month low, posting modest gains on Friday as a softer US dollar and easing Treasury bond yields provided near-term support," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

The pullback in the dollar and yields helped stabilise prices after recent weakness, while bargain buying near key support levels also contributed to the recovery, he added.

However, silver prices declined by ₹ 1,800, or nearly a 1 per cent, to ₹ 2,42,700 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) from Wednesday's closing level of ₹ 2,44,500 per kg, as per the association.

In the international markets, spot gold gained USD 91.80, or 2.02 per cent, to USD 4,635.52 per ounce, while silver rose 3.31 per cent to USD 73.69 per ounce. (PTI)

per cent).  
 "The decline was primarily driven by a sharp surge in crude oil prices, which spiked to multi-year highs amid escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and concerns over supply disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz."  
 "This raised fears of inflationary pressures and macroeconomic instability for oil-importing economies like India. Weak global cues, a sharp depreciation in the rupee to record low levels, and continued foreign institutional outflows further weighed on sentiment," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. Information Technology, Telecommunication and Focused IT were the winners.  
 "The rise in oil prices, along with persistent FII outflows and weak global cues, led to broad-based

## FDA renews modified risk status for IQOS US regulator allows continued reduced-exposure communication for heated tobacco products

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 30:** Philip Morris International has announced that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has renewed its Modified Risk Tobacco Product (MRTP) authorisations for IQOS devices and associated tobacco consumables, allowing the company to continue communicating reduced-exposure information to adult users in the United States.

The renewed authorisation covers two versions of the IQOS device along with three variants of HEETS tobacco sticks.

The regulator stated that continuing these authorisations is "appropriate to promote public health," taking into account both current tobacco users and non-users.

According to the FDA's findings, available scientific evidence suggests that a measurable reduction in harm is reasonably likely for individual users who switch from conventional cigarettes to heated tobacco products such as IQOS.

Stacey Kennedy, CEO of PMI U.S., said the decision reflects confidence in the company's research and long-term strategy.

"This decision from the FDA reflects both the rigorous scientific foundation supporting IQOS and our ongoing commitment to responsibly deliver smoke-free choices to adult consumers," she said.

IQOS works by heating tobacco rather than burning it, thereby reducing the formation of harmful chemicals typically associated with combustion.

While the company maintains that such products are not risk-free, it cites growing real-world evidence, including data from markets like Japan, indicating a de-



cline in cigarette consumption where heated tobacco alternatives are widely available.

The IQOS 2.4 system was first authorised under the MRTP pathway in 2020, followed by the IQOS 3 system in 2022.

The FDA is currently reviewing further applications, including for newer IQOS variants.

PMI said it has invested over \$16 billion since 2008 in developing smoke-free alternatives, as part of its broader goal of transitioning away from traditional cigarette sales.

The company estimates that its smoke-free products are now used by more than 43 million adults globally and account for over 40 per cent of its total revenue.

The development marks a continuation of regulatory engagement around reduced-risk nicotine products, even as public health debates over their long-term impact remain ongoing.

## Definedge Securities appoints Hemant Luthra as Chairman



**NEW DELHI, April 30:** Pune-based Definedge Securities on Thursday announced the appointment of industry veteran Hemant Luthra as Chairman and the induction of Ajay Srivastava and D Prasad to its board of directors.

The appointments come at a key stage in its growth as it strengthens its position as a wealth-tech platform focused on Technology-led market access, research-driven investing frameworks and investor education, the company said.

Luthra brings over four decades of leadership experience across technology, private equity, telecom, aerospace, and manufacturing sectors. He began his career at IBM and later served as CFO & COO of a leading industrial group. During a two-decade stint at Mahindra & Mahindra, he held multiple leadership roles, including chairman of Mahindra CIE.

Srivastava has over three decades of experience across transaction banking, investment banking, capital markets, and corporate restructuring, while Prasad is an Ultra-HNI investor.

Prashant Shah, CEO & Co-founder of Definedge Securities, said, "Hemant's deep expertise in building and scaling institutions, coupled with his global market experience, will be invaluable as we strengthen our leadership and governance framework." (PTI)

## PhonePe crosses 700 million users, sustains rapid growth

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 30:** PhonePe has crossed 700 million registered users on its platform as of April 29, 2026, marking a major milestone in India's rapidly expanding digital payments ecosystem.

The company said the achievement reflects its population-scale reach and continued growth across payments and financial services, driven by rising consumer trust and widespread adoption of digital platforms.

What stands out in PhonePe's journey is the pace of expansion.

While it took 136 days for the platform to reach its first million users, it

is now adding a million users every six days.

Between FY2023 and FY2025, the company recorded a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 56.25 per cent, highlighting consistent growth even at scale.

The platform's growth has been supported by its focus on speed, reliability and user-friendly design, enabling it to cater to a diverse and expanding user base across the country.

Sameer Nigam, Founder and CEO of PhonePe, said the milestone underscores growing trust in digital payments.

## Amazon Now orders growing 25 pc month-on-month in India: Amazon CEO Andy Jassy

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** E-commerce giant Amazon's quick commerce service 'Amazon Now' is witnessing a 25 per cent month-on-month growth in orders in India, Amazon President and Chief Executive Officer Andy Jassy said.

Amazon Now debuted in India in the first quarter of 2025, initially rolling out across select pin codes in Bengaluru. Globally, the service is live in the UAE, Mexico, the UK, the US, Brazil, and Japan.

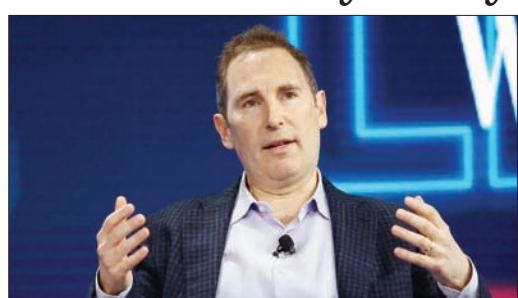
"We continue to expand our ultra-fast delivery service, Amazon Now, which offers delivery in 30 minutes or less on thousands of items. It started last year in India; orders are increasing 25 per cent month over month with Prime members tripling their shopping frequency once they start using it," Jassy told investors during the company's first-quarter earnings call for 2026.

Following its successful rollout and high adoption rate in India, the service has now been scaled globally.

Jassy noted that the service is currently available to "tens of millions of customers across nine countries", with plans for further expansion in the pipeline.

Amazon reported USD 181.5 billion in net sales, a 17 per cent increase year-over-year. Its operating income increased to USD 23.9 billion in the first quarter of 2026, compared with USD 18.4 billion in the first quarter of 2025.

Amazon Now operates in the highly competitive quick-commerce sector in India, going head-to-head with estab-



lished local players such as Eternal-owned Blinkit, Swiggy Instamart, Zepto, Flipkart Minutes, and Tata's BigBasket (BB Now).

Earlier this month, the e-commerce major announced the expansion of Amazon Now to 100 cities across India. The company, however, did not specify a definitive timeline for the completion of this rollout.

Currently, Amazon Now is available in Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, and Bengaluru.

Amazon, in a statement, said it will scale up its specialised fulfilment infrastructure and expand to more than 1,000 micro-fulfilment centres to support its quick-commerce ambitions.

The scale-up of the quick commerce service is part of Amazon India's ₹ 2,800 crore (about USD 300 million) investment. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Assam CM likened

ultimately convicted. But where is the necessity of arrest? What is there in the case which can be done without an arrest," Singhvi asked, adding that part of sections invoked against him are bailable while others don't require his arrest.

"He is not a flight risk. He is not interfering with the evidence and there is no allegation of non-cooperation in the case," Singhvi said, adding, "Why is it necessary to humiliate with a custodial interrogation? Why did 50-60 Assam policemen landed in Nizamuddin area to arrest Khera, as if he is a terrorist."

Singhvi urged that personal liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution must be protected and highlighted that Khera was not a hardened criminal but an active politician, and the case was essentially a political response to certain political allegations raised by the petitioner. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Assam government, opposed the plea and said Khera showed fake and doctored copies of passports of the chief minister's wife. He said Khera has been absconding and releasing videos and all the allegations about the chief minister's wife holding multiple citizenships are false.

Mehta added that certain fake documents regarding a company registered in the USA were also shown and the custodial interrogation of Khera was necessary to ascertain who his accomplices were, and to understand if there were foreign hands involved in fabricating the passports in the name of the complainant.

He added that the complete information gathered by the police cannot be revealed at this juncture. "As an investigating agency, I would like to know how you forged the documents? What was your intent? If you did not forge, who gave it to you? Who were the foreign elements who were interested in interfering with our elections? Custodial interrogation is qualitatively different from other forms of interrogation," Mehta said.

Following the allegations, Sarma's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, filed criminal cases against Khera and others at the Guwahati Crime Branch police station under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

The Telangana High Court had earlier granted Khera a seven-day transit anticipatory bail, but Assam Police moved the Supreme Court against it. The apex court passed an interim order to stay the grant of anticipatory transit bail and asked Khera to approach the Gauhati High Court. (PTI)

## Girls outperform boys

category students registered a 99.17 per cent pass rate, Other Backward Classes 99.12 per cent, Scheduled Castes 98.77 per cent and Scheduled Tribes 98.84 per cent.

The examinations were conducted across 67 subjects in ICSE and 45 subjects in ISC. The results are available on the official CISCSE website (ciscse.org). (PTI)

## Governor interacts with

Prof. Bechan Lal, Joint Director of Training at Assam Administrative Staff College Dimple Baruah, along with officials of Lok Bhavan.

## Exit poll predicts

of votes for five assemblies -- West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and Assam -- will be taken up on May 4.

Polls were conducted in a single phase in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu. West Bengal saw two-phase polling on April 23 and 29.

On April 9, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry went to polls. Tamil Nadu went to polls on April 23. While the BJP is seeking to retain power in Assam and Puducherry, where it is in an alliance government with All India N R Congress, the Congress is looking to wrest power from its rival in both these places.

In Kerala, the Congress-led UDF is seeking to replace the LDF government that is in power, while in Tamil Nadu, the DMK-led alliance is looking to retain power by thwarting the challenge from AIADMK-BJP and the debutant party -- Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam. The TMC is looking to retain West Bengal and thwart the challenge from the BJP. (PTI)

## Mizoram declared 'insurgency'

of being Mizo. "We are all Mizos. If sub-tribes within the Mizo community try to stand entirely on their own today, it is unlikely they would succeed. We must find contentment in our shared Mizo identity. We will thrive only through unity," he said.

Stating that the price of peace is high, Lalduhoma, who resigned from the Indian Police Service (IPS) decades ago to mediate peace during the secessionist movement spearheaded by the Mizo National Front (MNF), recalled that he left behind and lost many things so that peace could prevail in the region.

He lauded the surrendering cadres for their bravery, asserting that only the truly courageous have the strength to lay down arms for the greater good of the community. Lalduhoma reaffirmed that Mizoram no longer tolerates insurgency and called for collective commitment to safeguarding peace.

"The Mizo people will no longer permit insurgency to resurface in our land. Let us all abstain from anything that could trigger discord and unrest. Let us abandon policies and ideologies that incite conflict just for the sake of temporary gains and work together to sustain lasting peace and stability in our state," he said.

Home Minister K Sapdanga described the day as "historic," attributing the success of the agreement to Lalduhoma's consistent commitment to peace and hailed him as a "Symbol of Peace". The home minister also said that the government will work hand-in-hand with the surrendered cadres to fulfil their aspirations through democratic and administrative means. Assembly speaker Lalbiakzama, who was elected from Hmar-majority Chalfhlin constituency, welcomed the development, noting that peace in Hmar-inhabited areas had long been a key priority. Speaking on behalf of the group, Sanate acknowledged the changing political climate under the current Lalduhoma's administration. He stated that the construction of the "Unity Bridge" over Tuivai River linking Tipaimuk area in Manipur and the Tuirial-Mauchar road connecting Assam, as tangible signs that the government is committed to the development of Hmar-majority areas. Officials said that the Hmar People's Convention (HPC) spearheaded a political movement since 1986, demanding the creation of an autonomous district council (ADC) under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for Hmar-populated areas in northern and northeastern Mizoram. (PTI)

## SC orders forensic

Singh in the 2023 ethnic violence in Manipur. It had directed that the entire available leaked audio be forwarded to the NFSU, Gandhinagar, for forensic examination.

"The entire 48 minutes of the conversation in question, along with the admitted voice recordings of the former Manipur chief minister, are available... All the voice recordings furnished to the respondents by the learned counsel for the petitioner shall also be included therewith and forwarded to the National Forensic Science University in Gandhinagar," the bench had ordered then.

It had also asked the NFSU to expedite the process and submit the final report in a sealed cover. The top court had said that the audio clips in question may be examined to determine whether they were modified, edited or tampered with in any manner.

It had also asked the NFSU to determine whether the voice in the disputed audio clips matched the voice in the admitted audio clips, to give a clear finding that it was the same person who was speaking in all the audio clips. On December 15 last year, the bench questioned why the entire available leaked audio clips were not sent for forensic examination.

The top court had said that it was a "little disturbed" by the affidavit filed on behalf of the petitioners on November 20, 2025, that "states to the effect that only select clippings were sent".

The NFSU had earlier virtually given a clean chit, saying the leaked audio clips were "tampered with". Singh resigned as the chief minister of Manipur on February 9 last year, amid rumblings within the state BJP and growing demands for a change in leadership.

The apex court was hearing the petition filed by the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR), which has sought an independent SIT probe into the matter.

On November 3, 2025, the apex court noted that the NFSU had said that the leaked audio clips were "tampered with". According to the NFSU's report, the audio clips exhibited signs of editing and tampering and were not scientifically fit for forensic voice comparison, the court had said.

Bhushan had referred to a separate forensic report and said it had found that one of the recordings was unedited. On May 5 last year, the apex court examined a forensic report on the authenticity of the leaked audio clips and asked the Manipur government to file a fresh report on the probe.

The top court had previously sought a sealed-cover forensic report from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) on the authenticity of the leaked audio clips.

More than 260 people were killed and thousands displaced since the ethnic violence broke out between the Imphal valley-based Meitei and neighbouring hills-based Kuki communities in May 2023.

The clashes began after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against a Manipur High Court order on the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Bhushan had alleged that the recorded conversation prima facie showed the complicity and involvement of the state machinery in the violence against the Kuki Zo community.

KOHUR's plea alleged that Singh was instrumental in "inciting, organising and thereafter centrally orchestrating the large-scale murder, destruction and other forms of violence against the Kuki-dominated areas in Manipur". (PTI)

## US returns 657 stolen

Ranjeet Kanwar, from a temple in Madhya Pradesh in 2000. Convicted trafficker Vaman Ghiya then sold and shipped the statue to the New York-based gallery owner Doris Wiener.

In 2012, after the death of her mother Doris, Nancy Wiener — later convicted for antiquities trafficking — knowingly created false provenance for the 'Ganesha' statue, consigning it to, and selling it at, Christie's New York. The 'Ganesha' was purchased at the 2012 auction by a private collector who surrendered it to the Manhattan District Attorney's office earlier this year.

Another artifact is a red sandstone figure of a Buddha standing with his right hand raised in 'abhaya-mudra', a gesture of protection. The Buddha's feet are broken off below the knees and only fragments of the halo behind his head are visible, damage that likely occurred when the statue was looted from Northern India.

The USD 7.5 million-statue was smuggled into New York by Kapoor and was seized by the Antiquities Trafficking Unit from one of his New York storage units.

For more than a decade, the District Attorney's Antiquities Trafficking Unit, along with law enforcement partners at Homeland Security Investigations, have investigated Kapoor and his co-conspirators for the alleged illegal looting, exportation, and sale of artifacts from numerous countries in South and Southeast Asia.

The DA's Office obtained an arrest warrant for Kapoor in 2012. In November 2019, he and seven of his co-defendants were indicted for their conspiracy to traffic stolen antiquities.

Kapoor's extradition from India, where he was convicted for his trafficking activities in 2022, is pending. Five of Kapoor's co-defendants have already been convicted by the Manhattan District Attorney's office.

The Antiquities Trafficking Unit has now recovered more than 6,200 cultural treasures, including rare books, works of art, and antiquities, valued at more than USD 485 million, and returned more than 5,900 of those so far to 36 countries. The ATU has also convicted 18 individuals of cultural property-related crimes, with another 7 alleged traffickers pending extradition. (PTI)

## Special Secretary inspects projects under capital expenditure and Mission Shakti Finance Ministry official reviews central schemes in Nagaon

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, April 30:** Dr Sajjan Singh Yadav, Special Secretary, Department of Expenditure, Union Ministry of Finance, visited Nagaon district on Wednesday afternoon to review the progress of several centrally sponsored schemes.

During his visit, the Special Secretary inspected various ongoing development projects being implemented under the 'Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure' scheme and took stock of the construction work.

Dr Yadav first visited the Nagaon Police Reserve in the heart of Nagaon town, where he reviewed the construction of a four-storey building with 16 residential units being built to enhance housing facilities for police personnel.

Following this, the Special Secretary visited the State Women and Children's Home campus in Shivanagar to inspect 'Sakhi Niwas', a hostel being constructed for working women under



'Mission Shakti'. He assessed the progress of the project on site.

During the inspection, Dr Yadav held detailed discussions with senior district administration officials and engineers. While expressing satisfaction with the quality and progress of the construction work, he directed that all scheme-related works be completed within the stipulated timeframe. Emphasising effective implementation of the schemes, he stated that proper utilisation of government funds is essential for achieving real social development.

He was accompanied by Gauri Shankar Sarma, Director, Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Assam; Devashish Sarma, District Commissioner, Nagaon; Partha Pratim Das, Senior Superintendent of Police; Kamal Jit Sarma, Additional District Commissioner and Bholanath Pegu, District Social Welfare Officer.

Several other officials and staff from the police administration and the District Social Welfare Office were also present during the visit.

### Jorhat student wins national cultural scholarship

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, April 30:** Dhruvangee Keot, a Class 8 student of Jorhat Shemford School has earned the CCRT-CTSSS Scholarship (Centre for Cultural Resources and Training - Cultural Talent Search Scholarship Scheme) for the academic year 2025-26. This scholarship is awarded in Bihu dance under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, under the guidance of Guru Madhurima Barua.

Dhruvangee resides with her parents, Pranjal Keot and Rumi Borah, at the North East Institute of Science and Technology (NEIST) residential colony in Jorhat. The Government of India grants this scholarship to talented students aged 10-14 in recognition of their exceptional abilities at the national level and to further encourage them. Her achievement has brought pride not only to the school but also to the entire Jorhat region.

## NFR upgrades healthcare infrastructure across network in 2025-26

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 30:** Reinforcing its commitment to providing quality healthcare services to railway beneficiaries, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has undertaken significant initiatives to upgrade medical infrastructure and enhance patient care across its network during the financial year 2025-26.

In a major push towards modernisation of healthcare facilities, several advanced medical equipment have been installed across key railway hospitals. The Divisional Railway Hospital at Katihar has been equipped with a Digital X-ray system and a Fully Automated Auto Analyzer, substantially improving diagnostic accuracy and efficiency. At Rangpara North, a CR System X-Ray

Machine has been commissioned, further strengthening diagnostic capabilities in the region.

The Central Hospital at Maligaon has witnessed extensive upgrades with the installation of cutting-edge systems such as the Lasotronix Laser Diode, Super Inductive Physiotherapy System and a modern Steam Sterilizer. These additions are expected to significantly enhance treatment quality and patient outcomes.

In terms of infrastructure development, the Central Hospital at Maligaon has undergone notable improvements. A new Post Graduate Doctors' Hostel and Dormitory has been inaugurated, providing better residential facilities for medical professionals. Additionally, semi-cabins have been renovated and key wards including Female

Surgical and Orthopaedic Wards, along with the Burn Unit, have been upgraded to ensure improved patient care and comfort.

A major achievement during the year has been the successful establishment of a Haemodialysis Unit at Central Hospital, Maligaon under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode. This facility marks a significant step in strengthening critical care services and will greatly benefit patients requiring regular dialysis treatment.

These initiatives reflect NFR's continuous efforts to modernise its healthcare system, improve medical accessibility and ensure high standards of treatment for its beneficiaries. Northeast Frontier Railway remains committed to further strengthening its healthcare infrastructure in the coming years.

## Karbi Anglong DEO reviews training for counting staff

Training aims to ensure transparent and error-free counting for three ST constituencies



**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, April 30:** Karbi Anglong District Election Officer Aranyak Saikia reviewed the training session for Counting Supervisors and Counting Assistants of the three ST Legislative Assembly Constituencies—108 Bokajan, 109 Howraghat and 110 Diphu—held at the Farmers Growth Centre, Diphu. Comprehensive training was imparted to equip counting personnel with the required procedures and protocols, ensuring accuracy and transparency in the counting process. The training is aimed at facilitating a smooth, efficient and error-free counting process, reflecting the administration's commitment to conducting free, fair and credible elections.

## AJYP holds Bohagi Sanhati Sankalpa in Sivasagar

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, April 30:** Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Parishad (AJYP) on Thursday observed the Bohagi Sanhati Sankalpa programme at Sivasagar Rangpurjyoti Club with a day-long programme. On the occasion, the AJYP felicitated journalists MK Borthakur, Manoj Gogoi, Pradip Gogoi, Hamangshu Neog, Mujakkir Hussain, Bobita Bharali, Munna Agarwala, Moni Gogoi, Bolin Gogoi, Sasanjka Gogoi, Samudra Gogoi, Bitu Ali, Sariful Ali and Sahil Hussain.

General secretary Udayan Kumar Gogoi spoke on the objectives of the meeting as well as the overall objectives of the organisation. Ujjal Kumar Chutia, president, AJYP, said that the organisation has skipped all festivities, including the national festival Bihu, due to the unfortunate death of the heart-throb of the Assamese people, Zubeen Garg. He demanded justice for Zubeen Garg and said the new government to be formed after May 4 in Dispur will take responsibility for giving justice to the people of the state. He criticised the populist policy of the present government and said that until the indigenous people get a permanent solution to land and unemployment problems, social justice will remain a far cry.

Addressing the meeting, journalist MK Borthakur said that indigenous cultures can be preserved only through the sincere efforts of the indigenous people and economic self-reliance. Manoj Gogoi, secretary, Jila Sahitya Sabha, said that public organisations should publish their lists of work performed during the year. Anup Chetia of Motok Yuva Chatra Parishad said that cultural workers are still neglected. The meeting was attended by social worker Padma Chetia, Atmaram Agarwala, district secretary of AJYP Dhruva Saikia and others. The programme ended with the lighting of earthen lamps in front of Zubeen Garg's portrait and a hussori.

### FR filed against Tapan Gogoi

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, April 30:** In the Chabua-Lahowal area, a web portal had been independently running an anti-drug campaign and publishing a series of reports to raise public awareness. During this time, an unidentified group allegedly provided false information claiming that illegal drug activities were rampant in Phutahola village. Based on this misleading information, a news report was published.

Following this, conscious residents of the village came forward in large numbers and clarified that there is no such rampant drug trade in Phutahola village. They also helped build public opinion to counter the misinformation.

It is noteworthy that, without any evidence, Tapan Gogoi alias Babula, a notorious gambler, allegedly tried to instigate the villagers by accusing that the false information had been supplied by Kanchan Jyoti Gohain, a journalist associated with "Assam Aditya," "Amar Asom," and "Dainandini Barta," and also the central executive vice president of the All Assam Young Journalists' Association.

### Nagaon imposes curbs ahead of vote counting

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, April 30:** In view of the Assembly election vote counting and results scheduled for May 4, the Nagaon district administration has imposed a temporary ban on processions, bursting of firecrackers and the use of loudspeakers without prior permission with immediate effect from Thursday. District Commissioner Devashish Sarma issued the order under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita as a precautionary measure to maintain law and order during the sensitive period.

According to the directive, gatherings of five or more persons have been prohibited within a 100-metre radius of the counting centres, including Nagaon Govt Girls' Higher Secondary School, Nagaon Govt. Boys' Higher Secondary School and Dawson Higher Secondary and Multipurpose School. The order further states that no victory procession or rally can be taken out without administrative approval. The use, sale and supply of all types of firecrackers have been banned. Carrying any kind of weapon has also been strictly prohibited. The administration has warned that violation of these restrictions will attract penal action under the law. District Information and Public Relations Officer Bikash Sarma said that District Commissioner Devashish Sarma has made a public appeal urging all sections of society to maintain peace and harmony in the district during this sensitive period of result declaration.

### Workshop on personality development held at Biswanath College

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 30:** Biswanath College in collaboration with IMS Guwahati and the Directorate of Higher Education, Assam, organised a workshop on Personality Development and Preparation for Competitive Examinations on Thursday. The event was inaugurated by Dr Chintia Mani Sharma, Principal of Biswanath College.

Chandita Deka, Manager at IMS Guwahati, served as the resource person. She enlightened students on various aspects of personality development and provided training on tackling competitive examinations and interviews. Over 200 students from the science and commerce streams attended the programme, along with several faculty members, including Dr Rahul Sarma, Head of Zoology Department, Dr Nilofar Sheikh, Head, Botany Department, Pallabika Dihingia, Assistant Professor of Botany, Deepjyoti Nath, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Kabita Borah, Head of Commerce Department, Dr Arun Chaliha, Head of Mathematics Department and Gunin Borah, Head of Geography Department.

## Bezbaruah Award conferred on Dr Pitambar Deva Goswami

Noted writer and Satradhikar honoured at Sivasagar event



**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, April 30:** The Satradhikar of the Sri Sri Auniati Satra, noted writer, spiritual and public speaker, Padmashree Dr Pitambar Deva Goswami, was on Thursday conferred with the fifth Sahityarathi Laksmi-nath Bezbaruah Award 2025 by the Sivasagar District Students Union (SDSU) at a modest function at KPMG Hall in the presence of a host of distinguished persons, including Arundhati Bezbaruah from

the family of Laksmi-nath Bezbaruah, Prema Gogoi, Dwizen Gogoi, Makhan Bora, Sankarlal Agarwala, Dr Saumerjyoti Mahanta, Dr Arun Mahanta, Manoj Kr Borthakur, Bitupon Sarma, Dipankar Saikia, Manas Baruah, Dipali Bhattacharya Barua, Diganta Mangal Neog, Rajinder Joshi and leaders of the AASU units. The meeting held on the occasion was presided over by Manos Pratima Hazarika, president, SDSU.

Attending the meeting, the gen-

eral secretary of AASU, Samiran Phukan, said that Laksmi-nath Bezbaruah was a stellar example of what a multifaceted personality like Bezbaruah can do for a nation and that the award is a humble effort to honour a distinguished person contributing to the present Assamese community as well as Laksmi-nath Bezbaruah himself.

Receiving the award, Dr Pitambar Deva Goswami said that AASU, since its inception in the state has remained the eternal sentry of the Assamese people, their language and culture, ever ready to protect them at moments of crisis. Dr Goswami said that Laksmi-nath Bezbaruah was a 'sabyasachi', like Arjun of the Mahabharata. He said Bezbaruah, true to the title Sahityarathi, could write with equal ease across all genres of the Assamese language. Bezbaruah, he said, played a pivotal role when the modern Assamese language took shape in Kolkata and even today remains highly relevant.

## Morigaon enforces helmet rule for riders, pillion passengers

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, April 30:** A meeting of the District Road Safety Committee was held on Thursday at the office of the District Commissioner, Morigaon, under the chairmanship of District Commissioner Anamika Tewari. The meeting focused on reviewing and strengthening measures to prevent road accidents across the district.

The Superintending Engineer of the Public Works Roads Department, Morigaon and Member Secretary of the Committee, Jinnat Ahmed, apprised the members of the decisions taken in the previous meeting and the progress made so far.

Chairing the meeting, the District Commissioner directed all concerned departments and agencies to adopt strict and coordinated measures to curb road accidents. The DC highlighted special emphasis on the mandatory use of helmets by both riders and pillion riders on two-wheelers and called for strict enforcement of the same.

Emphasising the importance of awareness, the District Commissioner stated that road safety is a shared responsibility of all departments as well as every conscientious citizen. She also underscored the role of public representatives in sensitising the masses.



The District Commissioner further instructed that a comprehensive drive be launched among the youth for the issuance of driving licences. She stressed the need to simplify the licensing process and enhance public awareness regarding its importance.

Vehicle dealers were also urged to actively contribute to promoting road safety awareness and added that adherence to traffic rules and the habit of wearing helmets must be ingrained in people's daily lives, as this is crucial to effectively reducing road accidents.

The meeting also emphasised the installation of speed breakers at vulnerable points, wherever necessary and the need for widespread awareness campaigns to encourage compliance with road safety norms.

Among those present were Additional Superintendent of Police Anita Hazarika, Additional District Commissioner Nitissha Bora, Joint Director of Health Services Dr Sailendra Bardhan Bora, Deputy Superintendent of Police Pritam Saikia, along with heads of various departments.

## Police bust fake marksheets racket in Dhubri; 1 arrested

**HT Correspondent**

**DHUBRI, April 30:** Acting on specific intelligence, the Dhubri Police conducted a successful raid on Wednesday to dismantle a racket involved in the production and distribution of fraudulent matriculation (Class 10) marksheets.

Dhubri Police have confirmed the arrest of one individual identified as Sagar Ghosh, a resident of Khalilpur Nathpara in Dhubri. Ghosh went to a high school to take admission for Class XI on Wednesday. During verification of documents, school authorities became doubtful about the marksheet and informed the local police.

Following this, police personnel targeted an educational institution in the Magurmari Dongerpar area, leading to a significant breakthrough in the investigation. The crackdown focused on an institution identified as the English Education Academy. Law enforcement officials descended on the premises following reports that the centre was being used as a hub for forging academic credentials.

During the search, police personnel recovered from the English Education Academy and seized a substantial number of fake marksheets purportedly from the matriculation examination, along with several incriminating documents and records linked to the illegal operation.

"The seizure of these documents is a crucial step in protecting the integrity of our educational system," a police source stated. "We are currently investigating the extent of the fraud and identifying how many students or individuals may have procured these forged documents."

The discovery of a fake marksheet racket in the Magurmari Dongerpar area at the English Education Academy has sent shockwaves through the local community, raising concerns about the misuse of private educational institutions. The police are reportedly expanding their investigation to determine if other institutions or middlemen are involved in this criminal enterprise.

Meanwhile, the owner of the English Education Academy, Jahidul Hussain is absconding. Further arrests are not ruled out as the Dhubri Police continues to scan the seized documents and interrogate the primary suspect.

## Plantation drive held at Saralpara to boost reforestation in Kokrajhar

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, April 30:** Stepping to boost reforestation along forest areas in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) districts, a plantation drive was carried out on Thursday at Saralpara picnic spot along the India-Bhutan border in Kokrajhar district.

The initiative was undertaken by the Evergreen Charitable Trust in collaboration with the Forest Department, Kokrajhar and the 6th Battalion SSB Ranighuli, under the supervision of the Divisional Forest Officer, Haltugaoon Division.

Officials, forest personnel, SSB jawans and members of the local community actively participated in the drive.

A large number of saplings were planted at the Saralpara picnic spot, while seedlings were also distributed among attendees to encourage plantation efforts across the region.

## DHSK College bags Best NCC Institution Award



**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, April 30:** The historic Dibrugarh Hanumanbax Suraj-mall Kanoi College (Autonomous) has been selected for the Best NCC Institution Award 2025-26 by the NCC NER Directorate, Shillong, representing the entire Northeast region.

According to the Principal, Dr Sashi Kanta Saikia, the recognition has been awarded based on the outstanding performance of the college's NCC cadets at various national-level camps, along with several social service initiatives conducted under the guidance of ANO Dr Paragiyoti Chutia.

These activities include blood donation drives, awareness programmes, and the cadets' commendable results in B and C certificate examinations. The award will be formally presented at a dignified ceremony to be held from May 4 to May 6 at the NCC NER Directorate in Shillong, with participants from across Northeast India.

Expressing his happiness and pride, Dr Saikia stated that this achievement is a matter of great honour for the institution. He credited the leadership of ANO Dr Paragiyoti Chutia and the dedication and hard work of the cadets for bringing recog-

nition to the college across the region.

He also emphasised that this success is not only a proud moment for the college but also for the people of Dibrugarh as a whole. It is noteworthy that, along with DHSK College being selected as the best institution in the college and university category, the National Institute of Technology, Agartala was chosen as the best technical institution, while St Francis De Sales School, Guwahati was selected as the best school.

Additionally, a total of 10 NCC cadets from the college have been honoured with appreciation certificates by the Additional Director General of NCC (Northeast Region) for their exceptional performances at the national level.

Among them, cadet Raju Das earned the rare opportunity to participate in the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi and attend the Prime Minister's Rally, while cadet Debashish Dutta showcased remarkable talent in the Republic Day cultural competition. This achievement highlights the college's commitment to excellence and its growing reputation across Northeast India.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

We know what we are, but know not what we may be.  
-William Shakespeare

May Day call

As the world prepares to mark the 140th anniversary of the 1886 Chicago Haymarket Affair, including massive demonstrations and actions planned in the U.S. under the "Workers Over Billionaires" banner, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) is calling on the international working class to mobilise its forces this May Day in the struggle for workers' rights, democracy, peace, and equality. Representing more than 105 million workers across every corner of the globe, the WFTU—the historic international trade union organization—said the demands of the Chicago pioneers remain as urgent today as they were 140 years ago. "The crisis of capitalism is deepening and generalizing," they said in their May Day declaration. "Social inequalities are dramatically widening. Democratic freedoms and trade union rights are under attack across the world, while imperialist wars and interventions are on the agenda." Women workers, youth, and migrants continue to face intensified exploitation, lower wages, greater job insecurity, and limited access to health, education, and culture, they said.

Health and safety in the workplace, the federation noted, is being systematically degraded around the globe. Protective measures are treated as a "cost" by employers, leading to an increase in workplace accidents and fatalities. The WFTU also warned that the new era of digitalization and artificial intelligence, instead of being used for the benefit of workers and society, is being deployed to intensify exploitation, monitor workers, and expand flexible, precarious forms of employment such as gig-work and "independent" contractors. State and corporate repression against trade unionists and democratic freedoms is also intensifying around the world, they said. Strikes are increasingly criminalized, migrants and refugees are used as cheap labour with virtually no rights, and racism and exploitation remain rampant. The energy crisis, inflation, and high prices continue to erode workers' incomes while wages remain stagnant and the profits of multinational corporations soar.

Faced with this, the WFTU said, the response of the international working class must be to struggle. It issued a series of demands for this May Day, including: Wage increases and collective labour agreements with full rights; Effective measures to protect against high prices and inflation; Public and free healthcare, education, and social security for all; Reduction of work time, permanent employment with stable working hours, abolition of "flexible" forms of labour, and protection for workers on digital platforms; Health and safety measures in all workplaces; Respect for trade union rights and democratic freedoms; and Protection of migrants, immigrant workers, and equal rights for all. At the same time, the federation warned, government military spending is exploding, intensifying militarization and danger for working people everywhere. Meanwhile, the cost of these "war economies" is being passed on to workers through austerity, privatization, and the dismantling of social gains.

India's migrant workers are paying the price for Trump's Iran war

The US onslaught on Iran, and the resultant closure of the Strait of Hormuz, are having a massive global impact, and the consequences for Indian migrant workers are just one example. In recent weeks, with prices soaring, businesses closing, and fuel reserves rapidly running out, many migrant workers have been fleeing Indian cities and hurrying home to their villages in a desperate attempt to survive.

The current shortage of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders and limited availability of fuel, along with major food price hikes due to the war, has forced many restaurants and other businesses in the big cities like Delhi to close. In fact, many people are increasingly struggling even to cook in their own homes due to the lack of cooking fuel, and some are returning home so they can cook on traditional firewood stoves, which is not possible in their cramped city lodgings.

Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has claimed that gas cylinders are still easily available, but this is often not the case. In fact, migrant workers in Delhi are unable to access domestic gas consumer cards, which allow people to book gas cylinders online, demonstrating the direct and disproportionate impact of the crisis on migrants.

The scenes of workers travelling long distances in large numbers, while businesses abruptly close, are reminiscent of the first COVID-19 lockdown six years ago. In March 2020, as various lockdown measures were being imposed across the world, the Indian government swiftly opted for an extreme approach: shutting down transport connections nationally.

Meanwhile, factories and other workplaces were also abruptly being shut down, leaving India's millions of internal migrant workers no choice but to walk thousands of kilometres back to their home villages. Many tragically died of exhaustion or heatstroke along the way.

This experience of migrant workers during the lockdown is captured by Neeraj Ghaywan's 2025 film, Homebound. The final

section of the film follows the journey of two workers, childhood friends Shoaib and Chandan, from a rural North Indian village as they attempt to walk home to their village through the scorching sun.

Loosely based on a true story, the film captures the fear of the virus, showing how truck drivers taking people home to their villages would demand individuals leave the truck if they appeared to be sick or coughing. This is the fate of Shoaib and Chandan: after Chandan becomes dizzy on the truck, they are dropped on the side of the road, with no option but to walk the remaining 400 kilometres to their village.

The focus of the current mass migration is different than that of the 2020 lockdown: this time around, food is at the heart of people's decisions to migrate. There may not be the same kind of public health crisis, but millions are facing just as much of a struggle to meet their basic survival needs. Once again, Indian migrant workers are paying the price of a global economic catastrophe—this time, of course, caused by US imperial violence.

While the journey home is the climax of Homebound, the circumstances leading up to this point are equally central. Shoaib is Muslim and Chandan is Dalit; both of their families are poor, struggling, and reliant on the young men acquiring work.

Shoaib's father suffers from serious health problems and can't work, and Chandan's mother faces caste discrimination while toiling as a cook at a local school. These circumstances inform the series of events and choices that culminate in the pair taking jobs in a textile factory in the city, and their eventual return home during the lockdown.

Shoaib and Chandan's stories represent the intersection of caste and religion with class under India's current Hindu supremacist government. Their migration to the city happens relatively late in the film. Throughout the first half, their dreams of moving up within the system and obtaining state jobs are repeatedly crushed by reminders of

their outsider status, which come from colleagues, superiors, and the very structures within which they are applying for jobs.

Despite not passing the police entrance exam, which both men take at the beginning of the film, Shoaib does manage to secure a "respectable" job in sales. Chandan's father initially plans to take the textile factory job, while Chandan, having passed the police exam, waits for his appointment letter to no avail. Finally, after becoming disillusioned with the process, he decides to take the factory job in place of his father.

Sick of tolerating constant Islamophobia from his colleagues and superiors, Shoaib eventually re-

turns to the walk alone together, with Shoaib supporting Chandan as he becomes increasingly weak in the unflinching heat.

This is a poignant metaphor for their relationship throughout the film—the two men are the only real support system for each other. The solidarity in their shared struggles comes through in their use of "us" throughout the film. In different ways, the system is against them and will always try to keep them at the bottom.

On Sunday, April 19, thousands gathered at Udhna railway station in Surat, the same city in Gujarat where Shoaib and Chandan are working before they are forced to leave, waiting to board trains home to their villages in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. As the fuel crisis deepens, it is likely that we will see workers once again walking long distances on foot due to trains becoming overcrowded or trucks running out of fuel. No doubt the current situation is just the beginning of a devastating long-term impact of the US war on India's migrant workers.

In India's current fascistic political climate, Homebound is a brave production that has been surprisingly well received, given its subject matter. It even made the shortlist for the Oscars earlier this year (though it wasn't nominated in the end), just weeks before real life once again began to echo its scenes as the fuel crisis began.

The interplay between global imperialism and the far-right politics of India's own government is responsible for the plight of migrant workers. Shoaib and Chandan's agonizing walk home toward their village is not merely the product of the lockdown. It is the result of years of discrimination and lost hopes.

Importantly, migrant workers are fighting back. In April, there were protests across Northern India for better pay and working conditions, with thousands of factory workers, including many migrant workers, blocking roads in Noida, a city just outside Delhi. Solidarity with migrant workers in India like Shoaib and Chandan—and with people's movements like the Migrant Solidarity Network—has never been more crucial. (IPA Service)

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Ananya Wilson-Bhattacharya

muslim workers like Shoaib face Islamophobic prejudice, particularly the insinuation that they are not Indian and are actually from Pakistan or Bangladesh. This has escalated in recent months from taunts to become a chilling state-sanctioned policy through the special intensive revision (SIR) process. Rolled out across some Indian states in December 2025, the SIR is an exercise in recording voter eligibility that ultimately works to disenfranchise Indian Muslims as illegal immigrants.

For several months prior to this initiative, many Muslims from West Bengal were already being disenfranchised in this way. In summer 2025, hundreds of Bengali Muslims were unlawfully sent to Bangladesh (with many being subsequently readmitted). This campaign of harassment merely builds on the Citizenship Amendment Act passed in late 2019, which similarly sought to strip Muslims of their rights through propagating tales of illegal migration.

The images of workers on their journeys today, like the scenes from Homebound, tell a story of those forgotten by a country, an infrastructure, a global system. Shoaib and Chandan, after joining one such group on a truck, are ultimately left behind and forced to

merely a quantitative increase; it is a qualitative transformation. Consumption is no longer episodic—clustered around festivals, life events or long-term planning—but continuous, almost habitual.

Such a pattern is made possible by the infrastructure of digital payments and easy credit. Credit cards, in particular, have evolved into gateways to what the industry terms "lifestyle ecosystems"—bundled offerings that integrate travel, dining, retail and exclusive access. More than half of affluent consumers already use cards for such memberships, embedding financial services deeply into patterns of everyday life.

There is an efficiency to this system that is difficult to deny. Transactions are frictionless, access is seamless, and consumption becomes, in a sense, self-perpetuating. But there is also a deeper question: when financial innovation is primarily oriented toward amplifying discretionary spending at the top,

what happens to its broader developmental role? India's financial system has long grappled with the challenge of inclusion—of extending credit, savings and risk management tools to those outside the formal economy. The pivot toward high-margin, experience-linked consumption risks reinforcing a dual structure: one in which the affluent are offered ever more sophis-

high-productivity sectors has lagged. In such a context, the trickle-down of consumption patterns cannot be taken for granted.

Indeed, there is a risk that the new affluent economy becomes increasingly self-referential—a closed loop in which wealth circulates within a relatively small cohort, reinforced by exclusive services, global access and digital ecosystems that are, by design, exclusionary.

The geographic spread of affluence adds another layer of complexity. The expansion of premium consumption into cities such as Ahmedabad, Surat, Jaipur and Lucknow is often cited as evidence of democratisation. And in a narrow sense, it is. The base of affluent consumers is widening, and consumption patterns in these cities are converging with those of traditional metros. But this convergence does not necessarily imply inclusivity. Within these cities, disparities remain stark. The rise of high-end consumption coexists with persistent informality, underemployment and infrastructural deficits. The juxtaposition is not new, but it is becoming more pronounced.

There is, finally, the question of sustainability—not just environmental, but economic. An economy that relies heavily on discretionary, experience-driven spending is inherently sensitive to shocks. Travel, dining and luxury services are among the first categories to contract in times of uncertainty. The very flexibility that makes this model attractive in periods of growth becomes a vulnerability in downturns.

Moreover, the global orientation of affluent consumption exposes it to external risks—currency fluctuations, geopolitical tensions, regulatory changes—that are beyond domestic control. The more India's high-end demand is integrated into global circuits, the more it becomes subject to global volatility. None of this is to argue that the rise of an affluent, experience-driven consumer class is undesirable in itself. It reflects genuine gains in income, confidence and global integration. It creates opportunities for innovation in services, hospitality and digital platforms. It signals, in many ways, a country that is no longer constrained by scarcity. But to treat it as an unalloyed good is to miss the larger picture.

What is at stake is not simply the composition of consumption, but the character of growth. An economy in which the most dynamic segment is decoupled from employment-intensive sectors, in which financial innovation amplifies spending at the top more than inclusion at the bottom, and in which aspirations rise faster than opportunities, risks becoming structurally imbalanced.

The language of the industry—of moving from "share of wallet" to "share of life"—is revealing in this regard. It speaks to a desire not just to capture spending, but to shape behaviour, to embed consumption into the rhythms of daily existence. It is, in effect, an attempt to normalise a certain way of living—one that is accessible to a few, but visible to many. The question India must confront is whether this is the trajectory it wishes to institutionalise.

Is the goal to build an economy where success is measured by the frequency of premium experiences and the seamlessness of global transactions? Or is it to sustain a model in which consumption, however aspirational, remains anchored in production, employment and broad-based opportunity?

The answer will not be found in whitepapers or transaction data alone. It will depend on policy choices, institutional priorities and, ultimately, on how India chooses to balance the allure of affluence with the imperatives of equity.

For now, the signals are mixed. The affluent are spending, and in doing so, they are reshaping markets. But they are also, perhaps inadvertently, redrawing the boundaries of economic participation. And in that quiet redrawing lies the risk that India's next phase of growth, for all its dynamism, may prove less inclusive than the last. (IPA Service)

How New Zealand Fits into India's Economic Vision

The recent finalization of the India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) marks a significant moment for Indian trade policy. Signed in late April 2026, this deal might appear small if one only looks at the raw numbers of bilateral trade. New Zealand's economy is roughly one-sixteenth the size of India's and currently represents less than 1% of India's total trade volume. However, viewing this agreement in isolation ignores the rapid transformation of India's economic diplomacy over the last five years.

This pact is not just about sheep meat and software. It is the eighth major trade agreement India has secured in a little over three years, following deals with Mauritius, the UAE, Australia, the EFTA nations, the UK, the EU, and Oman. When placed in this broader context, the New Zealand agreement becomes a clear signal of India's intent to build a resilient, diversified trade network that reduces its vulnerability to any single global power or supply chain disruption.

The global landscape has changed drastically since the 2020 pandemic. India learned the hard way that relying too heavily on one source for imports is a strategic risk. China currently accounts for about 16% of India's imports, and while weaning the economy off this dependency is a monumental task, every new trade partner helps chip away at that dominance.

Equally important is the need to diversify export destinations. With major markets like the United States experiencing periods of trade friction and protectionist shifts, India needs reliable alternatives. By opening doors across the Middle East, Europe, and now the Indo-Pacific, India is ensuring that its exporters have multiple avenues for growth regardless of the political climate in any one region. The specific terms of the New Zealand FTA are particularly impressive.

In an unprecedented move, New Zealand has agreed to remove all tariffs on Indian goods immediately upon the agreement taking effect. This provides an instant competitive edge for Indian labor-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, footwear, gems and jewelry, and engineering goods. For a domestic industry looking to scale up, getting zero-duty access to a developed market like New Zealand is a major victory.

On the services side, the deal provides a significant boost for Indian professionals. The agreement includes provisions for the mobility of skilled workers, including a dedicated quota

for Indian traditional medicine practitioners, yoga instructors, chefs, and music teachers. It also streamlines visa processes for IT professionals, engineers, and healthcare workers, ensuring that India's human capital can find opportunities more easily in the New Zealand market.

Perhaps the most notable achievement of India's negotiators was what they managed to leave out. New Zealand is a global powerhouse in the dairy industry and has long pushed for access to the Indian market. However, India stood its ground to protect the livelihoods of millions of domestic dairy farmers. By excluding dairy and other sensitive agricultural products from the tariff concessions, the government has ensured that the gains of the FTA do not come at the expense of its rural economy.

Instead of broad agricultural concessions, the focus has shifted toward productivity. The two nations are expected to collaborate on improving agricultural technology and cold-chain logistics, allowing Indian farmers to benefit from New Zealand's expertise without being overwhelmed by their imports.

Following the model established by the recent EFTA deal, the New Zealand FTA includes a significant commitment to facilitate investments in India. New Zealand has pledged to facilitate \$20 billion in investments over the next 15 years. While this is a commitment to "facilitate" rather than a guaranteed legal obligation to invest, having it written into the text of the agreement is a powerful psychological and diplomatic tool.

To ensure these foreign investments actually materialize, India is creating a dedicated desk to handle the concerns of New Zealand investors. This targeted approach is designed to solve the "sticky" problems that often prevent foreign capital from reaching the ground, such as regulatory hurdles and administrative delays.

The India-New Zealand FTA is a testament to the growing confidence and skill of India's trade negotiators. They have successfully used India's massive market as leverage to secure favorable terms while safeguarding domestic industries.

While the immediate trade volume might be modest, the compounding effect of these multiple trade deals is profound. Each agreement adds a new layer of security and opportunity to the Indian economy. By diversifying partners, securing investment commitments, and protecting sensitive sectors, India is steadily building a more robust and self-reliant economic future. The deal with New Zealand is a small but vital piece of that much larger puzzle.

India's Affluence story needs a reality check for corrective action

There is a certain seductive neatness to the story India now tells itself about wealth. It is a story of ascent—of rising incomes, expanding aspirations, and a confident class of consumers who no longer measure success in square feet or car segments, but in experiences, access and global mobility. It is, at least on the surface, the story of a country coming into its own.

Yet beneath this narrative lies a more disquieting reality: the emergence of an affluent economy that is increasingly detached from the productive base that once underwrote it, and from the social compact that gave economic growth its legitimacy.

A recent whitepaper by Visa Inc., drawing on transaction-level data and survey insights with YouGov, lays out the contours of this shift with clinical precision. The numbers are striking, even celebratory. India's affluent population—defined as those earning above Rs. 10 lakh annually (roughly \$12,000)—has nearly doubled in recent years, reaching 13 million. Dining outlays are approaching Rs. 2 lakh (\$2,400) a year. Individual "experiences" now routinely command Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 50,000 (\$240–\$600). Travel, once an occasional indulgence, absorbs as much as 58% of discretionary spending among the ultra-elite, while nearly two-thirds of this cohort spends internationally.

The report frames these changes as evidence of a maturing consumer economy—one in which affluence is no longer a static income bracket but a behavioural pattern defined by frequency, intent and willingness to pay for convenience. But such a framing, while descriptively accurate, is analytically incomplete. It captures the symptoms of change without interrogating their consequences.

For what is emerging is not merely a richer India, but a differently structured one—an economy in which the most dynamic segment of consumption is increasingly untethered from domestic production, and in which the meaning of wealth is being redefined in ways that may ultimately prove exclusionary, even destabilising. To understand the magnitude of this shift, one must begin with the reordering of the affluent wallet. Historically, consumption at the top of the income distribution was closely linked to asset accumulation: homes, vehicles, jewellery, durable goods. These were not just markers of status; they were, in varying degrees, embedded in domestic supply chains, generating employment and anchoring wealth within the national economy.

Today, that linkage is weakening. As the Visa data makes clear, discretionary spending is migrating toward experiences—travel, dining, wellness, curated services—categories that are inherently more ephemeral and, crucially, more global in their orientation. When 63% of affluent consumers are spending internationally, the implications extend beyond tourism statistics. They point to a structural leakage of demand, where a growing share of high-value consumption is effectively exported. This is not to suggest that experience-led spending is economically sterile. It generates employment in hospitality, aviation, and services. But the intensity and distribution of that employment differ markedly from those associated with manufacturing or infrastructure. A luxury resort or fine-dining ecosystem, however sophisticated, employs far fewer people per unit of capital than a factory or a logistics network. The multiplier effects are narrower, the linkages shallower.

The consequence is an economy in which the upper tier of consumption expands rapidly without a commensurate broadening of the employment base. Growth, in other words, becomes increasingly top-heavy.

Compounding this is the shift in spending frequency. The report notes that three in four affluent consumers now make premium purchases at least once a quarter, and one in four does so every two weeks. This is not

AUTHOR

By: R. Suryamurthy



merely a quantitative increase; it is a qualitative transformation. Consumption is no longer episodic—clustered around festivals, life events or long-term planning—but continuous, almost habitual.

Consider the arithmetic. A single dining experience costing Rs. 50,000 (\$600) is, for many households, equivalent to a month's income. Annual retail spends of Rs. 10 lakh (\$12,000) place affluent consumers in a consumption bracket that is orders of magnitude removed from the median. When such expenditures become routine rather than exceptional, the symbolic distance between classes widens dramatically.

This is not simply a matter of optics. Consumption, particularly in a society as socially layered as India, carries meaning. It signals not just wealth, but belonging, aspiration and status. As premium experiences become more visible—amplified by social media, digital platforms and global branding—they shape expectations across the income spectrum. The risk is that aspiration begins to outpace opportunity, creating a persistent sense of relative deprivation.

The argument often advanced in defence of such shifts is that they represent the leading edge of a broader transformation—that today's affluent are tomorrow's middle class, and that their consumption patterns will, over time, diffuse through the economy. There is some historical precedent for this view. But it rests on a crucial assumption: that income growth is sufficiently broad-based to support such diffusion.

India's recent experience offers a more mixed picture. While the number of high-income taxpayers has risen sharply, wage growth for large segments of the workforce has been uneven, and employment generation in

# May Day and Workers' Rights

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Every year, the first of May is observed across the world as Labour Day. This day stands as a testament to the long-standing struggle for the dignity and rightful entitlements of workers. In any social system, it is impossible to imagine economic development without acknowledging the contribution of labourers. To understand the significance of May Day, one must closely examine its underlying economic and social causes. In 1886, the movement that arose in the city of Chicago in the United States demanding an eight-hour workday was a unified voice of the working class. At that time, workers were treated like livestock and were made to work for most of the day. In contrast, the minimal wages they received were extremely meagre. This exploitative system compelled workers to unite. Even in the present time, the relevance of May Day has not diminished, because although the nature of exploitation has changed in a globalized economy, the problems remain the same. Today, workers' rights do not only refer to working hours or wages, but also include health protection, social security, and the right to live with dignity. The backbone of any developed nation is its workforce, and if that strength remains weak, the overall progress of the nation is bound to stagnate.

During the nineteenth century, factory owners, in pursuit of greater profit, forced workers to labour for 14 to 16 hours a day. There was no special consideration even for women and children. The movement for an eight-hour workday was essentially an effort to claim time for rest and personal life. The slogan "Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for ourselves" contained a profound philosophy of life. The tragic incident that occurred at Haymarket Square in Chicago permanently altered the history of the labour movement worldwide. After several workers were killed in police firing, the world realized that the suppression of workers' strength could no longer continue. As a result, the International Labour Organization was formed in later years, and workers' rights were recognized as an integral part of human rights. However, in the present technology-driven era, the nature of these rights has become a subject of new debate. In the digital economy, many workers still spend their days in irregular employment and uncertain income, reminding us that the struggle symbolized by May

Day is far from over.

There is a direct relationship between workers' rights and economic equality. As long as a worker does not receive a fair share of the value of what they produce, the gap between the rich and the poor will continue to widen. This is not merely a matter of any particular political ideology, but a clear economic logic. Only when a worker's purchasing power increases does market demand rise, thereby keeping the economic cycle active. If capital is accumulated by exploiting labour, a time will come when there will be a lack of demand in the market, leading to economic recession. That is why leading economists now emphasize the importance of increasing wages and ensuring favourable working conditions. When workers' rights are protected, productivity also improves. A mentally and physically healthy worker can contribute far more effectively than one who is oppressed or exhausted. Therefore, even from the employer's perspective, taking care of workers' welfare is a beneficial business strategy. Unfortunately, in many cases, short-term profit motives lead to the sacrifice of workers' long-term interests, which ultimately disrupts social stability.

In the current era of globalization, safeguarding workers' rights has become a major challenge. Many multinational companies establish factories in countries where labour laws are weak and wages are extremely low. As a result, jobs are lost in developed countries, while exploitation increases in developing nations. This phenomenon can be described as a "race to the bottom." In such a situation, international cooperation becomes essential. Protecting workers' rights within a single country is not sufficient; instead, a minimum global standard of labour laws must be established.

In modern times, the declining tendency among workers to form trade unions or collective organizations is a matter of concern. Individually, it is nearly impossible for a worker to assert their rights against large corporate entities. Collective bargaining remains the most powerful tool for protecting workers' interests. Although technology has transformed the nature of work, the value of human labour should never diminish. The true lesson of May Day is that every form of labour deserves respect, and it must be ensured that no worker is exploited.

Another important aspect is the dignity of labour. In many societies, physical labour is con-



sidered inferior to intellectual work, which is a misconception. Every form of work is important, and every worker deserves respect. From sanitation workers to highly skilled technical experts, all contribute to the smooth functioning of society. Changing this mindset is crucial for the advancement of workers' rights. Gender inequality also remains a significant barrier. Even when performing the same work, women are often paid less than men.

Moreover, the lack of safety and adequate facilities for women in workplaces is a serious concern. Within the discourse of May Day, these issues affecting women workers must be given priority. Until equality is achieved among all sections of workers, the goals of the labour movement will remain incomplete. Therefore, May Day should not be limited to a single day of observance, but should become a continuous process that helps establish justice and equality in society.

In conclusion, although the history of May Day is old, its relevance remains profound. In today's world, where mechanization and artificial intelligence are attempting to replace human labour, the

protection of workers' rights has become even more essential. Technology should reduce labour, not take away livelihoods. Only through the combined efforts of governments, employers, and conscious citizens can a secure future for workers be built. If the hands of workers are what make the world beautiful, then it is our collective responsibility to ensure that those hands receive proper dignity and protection. May Day calls upon us to take a pledge that no worker should be deprived of their basic rights. This is not only for the benefit of workers, but also for the creation of a healthy and equitable world.

To fully understand the close relationship between May Day and workers' rights, it is necessary to examine every layer of the modern economy. The protests that arose against the inhumane conditions of early industrialization laid the foundation for the labour laws we have today. The weekly holidays, fixed working hours, and medical benefits we enjoy today are not acts of generosity, but the result of sacrifices made by countless workers. Preserving these rights remains a challenge, as profit-driven sys-

tems constantly seek loopholes to exploit labour. Therefore, on May Day, we must go beyond speeches and processions and become vigilant about the strict implementation of labour laws. Empowering workers means enabling a vast section of society to live with dignity. Only then can a truly developed and civilized society be built, where labour is not exploited but honoured.

It must be clearly understood that workers' rights are not confined within geographical boundaries; they are a global issue. When workers' rights are undermined in one place, the impact is felt across the global labour market. Hence, the unity of workers across nations is essential. In today's complex economic environment, old laws alone are not sufficient to protect workers; new, context-specific regulations are required. The struggle for workers' rights is essentially a struggle for humanity. To succeed in this struggle, society must move away from viewing workers with sympathy and instead recognize them as equal stakeholders. Only then will the true purpose of observing May Day be fulfilled.

## Lessons from 1936: Why France's Popular Front still matters today?

By: CJ Atkins

Ninety years ago, fresh from their May Day marches, the people of France went to the polls and made history. The election of May 3, 1936—the decisive second round of legislative voting—delivered a sweeping victory to the Front Populaire, the Popular Front coalition of Communists, Socialists, and Radicals who had united against the growing threat of fascism at home and abroad.

It proved to be no ordinary election result but rather a turning point for French democracy. Workers showed they could transform capitalist society by exercising their collective class power and—together with the workers of Spain, which had elected their own popular front government less than three months earlier—crafted a model for how the left could fight and win.

The anniversary of the Popular Front arrives at a moment that makes it feel less like history and more like a mirror. In France, a new coalition bearing the same name—the Nouveau Front Populaire—scored a surprise electoral triumph in 2024. The NFP succeeded in blocking the far right from power, but manoeuvres by the powers-that-be and internal divisions slowed its momentum. In the United States, with the MAGA movement having remade the Republican Party into a vehicle for authoritarian politics, questions of anti-fascist unity are no longer abstract. What the French Popular Front built in 1936, how it won, and why it ultimately fell apart, carries lessons democratic and working-class movements cannot afford to ignore.

The France of the mid-1930s was in deep trouble. The worldwide depression had hammered the economy, wages had fallen, and fascism—which had already swallowed Italy and Germany—was casting its shadow westward.

The threat was not merely external, though. In February 1934, far-right paramilitary leagues—the Croix de Feu, the Action Française, and others—launched a violent assault on the Chamber of Deputies in Paris, leaving 15 dead and serving as a warning that French fascism had real muscle behind it.

The Communist Party (PCF), the Socialists (SFIO), and the center-left Radical-Socialists had long been bitter rivals, competing for working class support and pursuing different strategies. But the 1934 riots, combined with the new anti-fascist strategy being developed within the Communist International under Georgi Dimitroff, began pushing them toward each other.

The Comintern's approach urged Communists to join forces with other political and class forces—socialists, liberals, and progressives of all kinds—to stop the fascist tide. It was a defensive move, to be sure, rooted not in sectarian idealism but in historical necessity.

On Bastille Day 1935, the three parties held a massive joint demonstration in Paris, marking the formal birth of their coalition. Their unity was not ideological uniformity—the Communists were committed revolutionaries determined to see capitalism ended, the Socialists preferred a slower reformist path of change, and the Radicals were bourgeois republicans. But they shared a common goal: stopping fascism and defending democratic institutions. That defensive purpose was the glue that held the Popular Front together. The Popular Front won 370 of the 618 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, a solid majority. The Socialists emerged as the coalition's largest party. The Communists surged from 12 seats to 72, driven by working-class neighbourhoods in the industrial suburbs of Paris.

Léon Blum, the Socialist leader, became the first socialist—and the first Jew—to serve as prime minister of France. The Communists declined ministerial posts but pledged firm parliamentary support, a "support without participation" arrangement that kept the Radicals comfortable while guaranteeing the government had majority support to pass laws.

The election victory immediately unleashed something neither the parties' leaders nor their opponents had fully anticipated. Across France, workers who had endured years of wage cuts rose up in a massive wave of factory occupa-

tions. By June 1936, nearly a million workers had occupied their workplaces in a rolling general strike, the largest in French history.

The Blum government moved quickly to translate the strike wave into legislative gains. On June 7, at the Hotel Matignon, the prime minister brought together the national employers' federation and the CGT labor federation to negotiate what became known as the Matignon Accords—a document that remade French working-class life. Workers won the legal right to join a union, to bargain collectively, and to strike, if necessary. Wages rose sharply, and a 40-hour work week was established. Every French worker received two weeks of paid vacation, a right that had never existed before. The CGT, which was led by the Communist Party, saw its membership explode from under 800,000 to more than four million within a year.

The Blum government also dissolved the far-right paramilitary leagues, nationalized key defense industries and the Bank of France, and included women in the cabinet for the first time—even though women could not yet vote in France. For millions of workers, 1936 was not just an election victory. It was a transformation unleashed by the arrival of the Popular Front government itself.

The Popular Front brought many achievements for the working class, and it did so faster than anyone thought possible. But the coalition also came up against a number of roadblocks and faced its own internal contradictions.

The French Senate remained in conservative hands and repeatedly blocked Blum's program, including plans to give women the right to vote. Capital fled the country, staging what amounted to an investment strike. Inflation eroded some of the rapid wage gains. And elements within the business and military elite were unconvinced that fascism wasn't still the way to go to secure their interests. They repeatedly used antismilitarism as a means to try to undermine support for the Jewish prime minister.

By June 1937, just a year after taking office, Blum was forced from power. The coalition survived in weakened form, but the Spanish Civil War—which split the Front over whether to aid the besieged Spanish Republic—proved fatal to its cohesion. Most of the left wanted to come to the aid of the those defending democracy in Spain, but the right wing was threatening to bring the war to France itself.

Blum, torn between his convictions and fear of a wider war, opted for non-intervention, a choice that haunted him. The Radicals turned on him and forced the Socialists out of the cabinet. The Popular Front formally dissolved in autumn 1938. When the Radicals joined together with Britain to hand over Czechoslovakia to Hitler in the Munich Agreement, the Communist Party could no longer support the coalition. France itself eventually fell to the Nazis in June 1940. The reactionaries of Vichy imprisoned Léon Blum, who spent time in Buchenwald. The Communist Party went underground and led the partisan resistance under German occupation, earning it a permanent place in the hearts of French workers.

After the war, the PCF was the largest party in France and entered the government together with the Socialists. Maurice Thorez, the Communist leader, became deputy prime minister. U.S. intervention in French affairs eventually resulted in disrupting the left, but the Popular Front legacy endured. The Matignon Accords became cornerstones of the French social contract rebuilt after the Liberation. The memory of 1936—of what was possible when the left united—acquired iconic status in French political culture, comparable to the Paris Commune before it. Thorez later evaluated the Popular Front, assessing its nature and strategic correctness. "The Popular Front wasn't a revolution, nor was it a vulgar electoral operation," he said in 1960. "It offered the possibility of a progressive politics within the framework of republican institutions. As realists, we would only demand what was possible in the conditions of the moment, in order to call for it in greater numbers and to be sure of obtaining it; but we would

strongly demand it."

That memory was explicitly invoked in June 2024, when France's fractured left parties—La France Insoumise, the Socialist Party, the Greens, and the Communist Party—united almost overnight under the banner of the Nouveau Front Populaire to contest snap elections called by President Emmanuel Macron, who hoped to gain a majority for his minority centrist government. The parallels to 1936 were unmistakable. As French Communist Party leader Fabien Roussel declared at the NFP's launch, it was "time to open a new stage for the left." The coalition's program—wealth taxes, pension reform, minimum wage increases, ecological planning—echoed the ambitions of the original Popular Front even as it updated them for the 21st century.

The electoral gamble backfired on Macron. The NFP ran joint candidates across all 577 constituencies, deployed tactical second-round withdrawals, and emerged as the largest bloc in the National Assembly with 193 seats, denying the far-right National Rally the majority it had seemed within reach of winning and leaving Macron's allies squeezed even further.

But also like 1936, the coalition's internal tensions proved difficult to manage once the election was won. Macron refused to appoint an NFP prime minister, turning instead to the right. The NFP's parties wrangled over foreign policy and strategy. The Socialist Party's decision not to support a no-confidence vote against Macron's appointee, François Bayrou, in early 2025 strained coalition unity.

In local elections in early 2026, the coalition frayed further, as Jean-Luc Mélenchon's group, La France Insoumise, ran separately and often challenged other NFP candidates. With presidential elections due next year, it's unclear whether the NFP will again come together. The 2026 municipal contests showed that left side of the political spectrum holds a plurality of French votes, but frustration with politics as usual is propelling the right forward, and divisiveness on the left poses a danger to the effort to build a united front to stop them.

The history of France's Popular Front is not a simple success story. It is a tale of what becomes possible when diverse forces subordinate sectarian difference to a common democratic purpose—and of what is lost when those forces fail to maintain that unity under pressure.

It speaks directly to the present moment in the United States. As this publication has argued, the MAGA movement has not merely won elections; it has systematically worked to suppress the vote, concentrate executive power, attack labour rights, and dismantle institutional checks on authoritarian rule.

And with capital wielding mass influence in both parties of our two-party system, the need for a broad coalition that struggles in all arenas—in elections, in the workplace, at school, in city councils and state legislatures, in the streets—is necessary. Against a coalition of reaction like MAGA, no single party or tendency on the left can prevail alone. The Popular Front strategy—building the broadest possible alliance of working-class organizations, unions, and democratic movements around a shared defensive goal—is not a relic of the interwar period. It is a political necessity in today's world.

This does not mean dissolving left politics into the Democratic Party mainstream. It means honestly assessing, as Dimitroff urged in 1935, who the main enemies are and who the potential allies are—and building unity and relationships accordingly. It means labor unions, racial justice movements, immigrant rights advocates, women's groups, democratic reform coalitions, tenant organizers, climate justice groups, elected officials, and more all finding their firm points of common action.

The original Popular Front was born in crisis, and so was the new one. Neither was born in comfort. Both were built against the pressure of an advancing right by people who understood that the cost of defeat was defeat—and that in that context, division meant something far worse than a normal electoral setback. (IPA Service)

## Contours of May Day have changed with new challenges to labour

By: Nilotpal Basu

May Day, the International Workers' Day, is celebrated on May 1, to commemorate the working class movement's struggle for an eight-hour workday, immortalised by the conflicts from the 1886 Haymarket affair in Chicago. It was established by an international federation in 1889, now recognised globally to promote worker solidarity and rights. On May 1, Chicago witnessed a great outpouring of workers, who laid down tools at the call of the organised labour movement of the city. It was the most effective demonstration of class solidarity yet experienced by the labour movement itself.

The importance at that time of the demand—the 8-hour day—and the extent and character of the strike gave the movement significant political meaning. The blood bath at Haymarket Square, the railroading to the gallows of Parsons, Spies, Fischer and Engel, and the imprisonment of the other militant Chicago leaders, was the counter-revolutionary answer of the Chicago bosses. It was the signal for action to the bosses all over the country. The second half of 1886 was marked by a concentrated offensive of the employers, determined to regain the position lost during the strike movement of 1885-1886.

One year after the hanging of the Chicago labour leaders, the Federation, at its convention in St. Louis in 1888, voted to rejuvenate the movement for the 8-hour day. May 1, which was already a tradition, having served two years before as the concentration point of the powerful movement of the workers based upon a political class issue, was again chosen as the day upon which to re-inaugurate the struggle for the 8-hour day. It signalled the assertion of the class unity and solidarity which has evolved beyond US shores across the world as the most significant expression of the collective intervention of the working as a distinct class in shaping history. Marx had famously observed "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." The changing context of the working class and the internalisation of its lessons provide new opportunity to evaluate the experience and the tasks that lie ahead.

In every sense, May Day celebration and its international recognition has been the greatest validation of Marx's contention. Marx's concrete study of the nature of capital also lays out a road map for a conscious development in battling exploitation and towards social transformation. Marx's prognosis clearly indicated the inherent tendency of capital towards concentration and centralisation.

However, capital's trajectory is not autonomous and comes in conflict with labour. Labour's response is conditioned by the growth of productive forces. Therefore, the labour movement



must also contend with the continuous changes in the instruments of production which includes strides in technology. The ownership of capital is eternally engaged to exploit the advances in technology to extract a higher share of profit. Obviously, the working class has to react to this evolving trend to defeat that attempt. This battle goes on through times.

The glorious saga of John Henry and his heroic hammer recorded the saga of the workers in the initial days of steam engine. The struggle continues right up to the present day of new artificial intelligence. An excellent piece in The Jacobin – 'Smartphone Society' – a decade back, had chronicled the nimble-footedness of the workers' movement in confronting the challenge of the application of smartphones in expanding the work hour. The German workers evolved a demand of shutting down their e-mail after sundown; subsequently that was accepted.

This era of advanced technology has paved the way for astronomical growth of productive forces and the consequent engagement between capital and labour for facing the challenge of enhanced exploitation.

This phase of contemporary capitalism is characterised by unprecedented drive of finance capital leading to the very phenomena of international finance capital and the consequent neoliberal globalisation. Of course, this paradigm witnessed nation-specific versions of neoliberalism. But this phase has also led to extraordinary centralisation of capital and the spatial diffusion of productive activities. Resulting from this development, this contemporary reality also has given rise to great levels of migration both within and across countries.

The mobility of labour has started getting reflected in international politics. A shining testimony is the unprecedented solidarity for Palestinian people against the barbaric genocide by US-Israel axis. This solidarity has also shaken the conservative pro-Israel support in many European nations and camp followers of US imperialism.

In India, there is a major change in the political landscape which affects the working-class movement. The aggressive neoliberal policy and the corporate-communal nexus spearheaded by the Modi government, pursues aggressive communal polarisation, undermining of

democracy and consolidation of authoritarian fascist rule. This is also characterised by a sharp acceleration of social and economic inequality, and burgeoning unemployment.

This threatens the very subsistence of the working-class. The characteristics of neo-fascist governance are expressed in the new labour codes which were fashioned last year but have come into enforcement from the new financial year. As part of the new features of the functioning of capital, the major restructuring of the labour, unorganised sector and informalisation has assumed rapid pace.

The loss of real wage has pushed the workers' backs to the wall. The backdrop of the May Day this time around is the growing phenomena of the outbreak of several spontaneous working-class actions in Haryana, Noida, Rajasthan, Udhm Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand, Bathinda in Punjab, and so on and so forth.

No doubt the observation of May Day this year will involve the study of the concrete specifics which has triggered this disquiet. It is the task of the working-class movement and the Party to weave these disparate actions into an integrated powerful movement for reversing the labour codes. Such working-class activism has to eventually take up the political task of facing the challenge of the neo-fascist aggression. (IPA Service)

*The importance at that time of the demand – the 8-hour day – and the extent and character of the strike gave the movement significant political meaning. The blood bath at Haymarket Square, the railroading to the gallows of Parsons, Spies, Fischer and Engel, and the imprisonment of the other militant Chicago leaders, was the counterrevolutionary answer of the Chicago bosses.*

## Inquiry into antisemitic attack that left 15 dead in Sydney Gun reform recommended in Australia

**MELBOURNE, April 30:** A government inquiry into a rise in antisemitism across Australia before a mass shooting killed 15 people at a Hanukkah celebration late last year recommended on Thursday that authorities prioritize gun reform.

The government established the Royal Commission on Anti-Semitism and Social Cohesion after father and son Sajid and Naveed Akram allegedly opened fire with legally-owned guns at the celebration at Bondi Beach on December 14, 2025. Authorities say their attack was inspired by the Islamic State group.

Royal Commissioner Virginia Bell made 14 recommendations on Thursday in her first interim report, five of which were not made public because they were classified as confidential for national security reasons.

The report also noted there had been a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents in Australia since the war between Israel and Hamas began on October 7, 2023.

The United States and Israel's attack on Iran in February was "likely to have increased the risk of attacks directed at the Australian Jewish community", it said.

**Report proposes new limits on gun ownership and follow-up on**



**gun licenses**

The recommendations included that the federal and state governments prioritize implementing nationally consistent gun laws and a gun buyback.

Sajid Naveed was shot dead by police at the crime scene. He was a licensed shooter who legally owned the guns used.

Under new restrictions proposed by the federal government, the Indian-born Australian permanent resident would have been banned from holding a gun license because he was not an Australian citizen.

His son was wounded but survived. Naveed Akram has been charged with committing a terrorist act, 15 counts of murder and 40 counts of attempted murder. He has entered no pleas.

The government has also proposed limiting the number of guns someone can own to as few as four and implementing periodic reviews of existing gun licenses.

The new restrictions would be accompanied with a gun buyback scheme to compensate gun owners who must hand in weapons. The government has proposed sharing

the cost of the buyback with the six states and two territories. But some states have said they won't pay.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said his government had agreed to implement all the recommendations that were relevant to federal authorities.

Albanese said he hoped the recommended gun reforms were implemented.

"I certainly hope that that occurs and would continue to engage constructively with state and territory governments to say that this is reform which is necessary," Albanese told reporters.

Albanese noted that Australia commemorated on Tuesday the 30th anniversary of Australia's deadliest mass shooting in modern times.

A landmark national firearms agreement virtually banned rapid-fire rifles after a gunman killed 35 people in Tasmania state on April 28, 1996.

"The nation is safer because of that," Albanese said.

**Government moves to increase protection of Jewish sites**

Albanese noted that despite concluding that risks to Australian Jews were rising, the report found that no urgent changes were required to keep Australians safe.

"There has been a rise in antisemitism. That is a global phenomenon," Albanese said.

"That is something that has happened right around the world. Governments need to respond to it. We are responding to it," he added.

The report noted that the government had allocated 102 million Australian dollars (USD 73 million) to increase security at Jewish sites including synagogues and schools.

The money is administered by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the community's peak organisation.

The council's co-chief executive Alex Ryvchin said the report was an important part in the process of making Jewish Australians feel safe again.

"We need to get to a point where Jewish Australians at Hanukkah this year ... feel safe, that we can gather again, that we won't be targeted," Ryvchin told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"It's going to be a long process to get us to that point. There's a deep sense of trauma in the community and ... a lot of unanswered questions, but this is an important step in the process," he added.

Public hearings in the inquiry begin on Monday next week. (AP)

## Iran's supreme leader says it will protect its nuclear, missile capabilities



**DUBAI, April 30:** Iran's supreme leader said Thursday that the Islamic Republic will protect its "nuclear and missile capabilities" as a national asset, likely seeking to draw a hard line as US President Donald Trump seeks a wider deal to cement the shaky ceasefire now holding in the war.

Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, speaking in a written statement read by a state television anchor as he has since taking over as Iran's supreme leader, struck a defiant tone, insisting the only place Americans belonged in the Persian Gulf is "at the bottom of its waters" and that a "new chapter" was being written in the region's history.

However, his remarks come as Iran's oil industry has begun to be squeezed by a US Navy blockade halting its oil tankers from getting out to sea.

Meanwhile, benchmark Brent crude for June delivery reached as much as USD 126 a barrel in trading on Thursday as Iran maintains its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all crude oil and natural gas traded passes. All this is putting additional pressure on the world's economy as Trump likely weighs how to respond.

"By God's help and power, the bright future of the Persian Gulf region will be a future without America, one serving the progress, comfort and prosperity of its people," Khamenei said in the statement, read like all others since he reportedly was wounded in the February 28 attack that killed his father, the 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"We and our neighbours across the waters of the Persian Gulf and the (Gulf) of Oman share a common destiny. Foreigners who come from thousands of kilometers away to act with greed and malice there have no place in it — except at the bottom of its waters."

**Ceasefire shaken as strait choked off**

With a fragile ceasefire in place, the US and Iran are locked in a standoff over the strait. The US blockade is designed to prevent Iran from selling its oil, depriving it of crucial revenue while also potentially creating a situation where Tehran has to shut off production because it has nowhere to store oil.

The strait's closure, meanwhile,

has put pressure on Trump, as oil and gasoline prices have skyrocketed ahead of crucial midterm elections, and it has pressured his Gulf allies, which use the waterway to export their oil and gas.

A recent Iranian proposal would push negotiations on the country's nuclear program to a later date. Trump said one of the major reasons he went to war was to deny Iran the ability to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran long has maintained its program is peaceful, though it enriched uranium at near-weapons-grade levels of 60 per cent.

Speaking to mark Persian Gulf Day in Iran, Khamenei's remarks signalled that nuclear issues and Iran's ballistic missile programme wouldn't be traded away.

"Ninety million proud and honourable Iranians inside and outside the country regard all of Iran's identity-based, spiritual, human, scientific, industrial and technological capacities — from nanotechnology and biotechnology to nuclear and missile capabilities — as national assets, and will protect them just as they protect the country's waters, land and airspace," Khamenei said.

He referred to America as the "Great Satan", a long hurled insult by Iranian leaders toward the US since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

**Khamenei signals strait will remain shut**

In his remarks, Khamenei seemed to signal Iran would maintain its control over the waterway, which sits in the territorial waters of Iran and Oman. Iran had been charging some ships reportedly \$2 million apiece to travel through the strait.

"Islamic Iran, by giving practical thanks for the blessing of exercising control over the Strait of Hormuz, will make the Persian Gulf region secure and put an end to the hostile enemy's abuses of this waterway," Khamenei said.

"The legal rules and new management of the Strait of Hormuz will bring comfort and progress for the benefit of all the region's nations, and its economic gains will gladden the hearts of the people."

However, the world considered the strait an international waterway, open to all without paying tolls. Gulf Arab nations, chief among them the United Arab Emirates, have decried Iran's control of the strait as akin to piracy. (AP)

## Nepal Airlines apologises for showing J&K as part of Pakistan in 'network map'

**KATHMANDU, April 30:** Nepal Airlines on Thursday apologised for what it described as cartographic inaccuracies in the wake of a furor showing Jammu and Kashmir as part of Pakistan in a "network map".

The airlines had deleted the social media post on Wednesday following the backlash.

"We sincerely apologise for error in the network map recently shared on our social media channels. The map contained significant cartographic inaccuracies regarding international boundaries that do not reflect the official stance of Nepal or Nepal Airlines," it posted on X.

"We have immediately removed the post and are conducting an internal review to ensure our materials meet the highest standards of accuracy."

"We deeply value our strong relationships with our neighbours and friends in the region and regret any offense the post has caused," the airline added. (PTI)

## Pakistan Navy commissions its first Hangor-class submarine in China

**ISLAMABAD, April 30:** The Pakistan Navy on Thursday commissioned its first Hangor-class submarine, armed with state-of-the-art weapons and advanced sensors, at a ceremony held in Sanya, China.

"The commissioning of the first Hangor-class submarine marks another chapter in the time-tested and enriching friendship between Pakistan and China," the army said in a statement.

President Asif Ali Zardari, who is on a visit to China, attended the event as the chief guest. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf and senior officials from the Pakistan Navy and People's Liberation Army (Navy) were also present on the occasion.

President Zardari termed the commissioning a "historic milestone" in Pakistan Navy's modernisation, reaffirming his country's resolve to maintain a robust, balanced and credible defence posture.

He said that Pakistan is fully capable of defending its sovereignty, protecting its maritime interests, and securing its economic lifelines.

Admiral Ashraf highlighted growing threats to global trade and energy security at key maritime choke points, stressing the need for technologically advanced naval forces to ensure a stable, rule-based maritime order.

He said the Hangor-class submarines, equipped with state-of-the-art weapons, advanced sensors, and Air Independent Propulsion, will play a key role in maintaining maritime stability.

The naval chief added that the submarines will be vital in deterring aggression and safeguarding Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) across the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean region.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces Asim Munir congratulated the nation and the Pakistan Navy on the achievement, the army said. Pakistan and China enjoy close cooperation in the defence field. (PTI)

## New Zealand court rejects appeal by mosque gunman to abandon his guilty pleas

**WELLINGTON, April 30:** The white supremacist who shot to death 51 Muslims at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, lost an attempt to abandon his guilty pleas at the country's Court of Appeal on Thursday.

The panel of three judges dismissed Brenton Tarrant's claim that harsh prison conditions prompted his involuntarily admission to the terrorism, murder and attempted murder charges he faced. The Australian man, who is now 35, murdered 51 worshippers and injured dozens more in March 2019 when he drove to two Christchurch mosques and opened fire with semi-automatic weapons during Friday prayers.

Tarrant's guilty pleas in March 2020 brought relief to bereaved families and survivors of the attack, who dreaded the prospect of a lengthy trial and feared he would use it to air his hateful views. The failure of his appeal bid — which the court noted was made 505 days after the legal deadline for it to be filed — means such a trial has again been averted.

His claim of mental illness was rejected.

At the court's five-day hearing in February, the attacker argued his admissions of guilt were provoked by



"irrationality" induced by poor mental health, which led him to desert his racist views for a time. The judges concluded, however, that his claims of mental illness were inconsistent and weren't supported by prison staff, mental health professionals or lawyers who had earlier represented him.

"He was not suffering from a mental impairment or any other form of mental incapacity which rendered him unable to voluntarily change his pleas to guilty," the judges wrote. "He endeavoured to mislead us about his state of mind in a weak attempt to advance an appeal

in circumstances where all other evidence demonstrated that he made an informed and totally rational decision to plead guilty."

The court's ruling also revealed that Tarrant sought to abandon his appeal shortly after making his case at the hearing in February. The judges rejected that bid too, writing that the case was "of significant public interest and should be finally determined."

They suggested that Tarrant "began to form the opinion that the hearing was not proceeding in his favour, and as a result decided to file a notice of abandonment after the hearing concluded." New Zealand law doesn't require judges to allow an appellant to quit an appeal bid once it's underway.

He will remain in jail for life. Tarrant, who has since fired the lawyers acting for him in February, remains in Auckland Prison, where he was sentenced in August 2020 to spend life in prison without the chance of parole. The judges allowed him to abandon his appeal that sentence, which was scheduled to be heard later in 2026.

The Australia-born man moved to New Zealand in 2017 with a plan to commit a mass shooting. He amassed a cache of weapons and made a reconnaissance trip to the sites of his planned crimes before the attack.

The appeal court judges wrote that Tarrant had accepted the summary of facts presented to him by the police and the sentencing judge and noted that the case against him was "overwhelming."

Evidence included footage of the attack that the shooter filmed himself and livestreamed on the internet, in which he showed his own face, and a document outlining his racist views that he published online before the attacks under his real name. (AP)

## USS Ford aircraft carrier to head home

**WASHINGTON, April 30:** The world's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R Ford, will be heading home following a record-setting deployment of more than 300 days that included participating in the war against Iran and capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, two US officials said Wednesday.

The Ford will be leaving the Middle East in the coming days and returning to its home port in Virginia in mid-May, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to detail sensitive military movements. The Washington Post reported the development earlier. The arrival of the USS George H W Bush to the region last week meant three American aircraft carriers were deployed to the Middle East — a number not seen since 2003 — during a tenuous ceasefire in the Iran war. USS Abraham Lincoln also has been in the region since January as tensions with Tehran ramped up.

This month, the Ford broke the US record for the longest post-Vietnam War deployment, a nearly 10-month span after leaving Naval Station Norfolk in June.

The ship's 295th day at sea surpassed the previous

longest deployment by an aircraft carrier in the past 50 years, when the Lincoln was sent out for 294 days in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to data compiled by US Naval Institute News, a news outlet run by the US Naval Institute, a nonprofit organisation. The Ford's long deployment has raised questions about the impact on service members who are away from home for long periods as well as increasing strain on the ship and its equipment, with the carrier already enduring a fire that forced it to undergo lengthy repairs.

Asked about the Ford's long deployment in a hearing Wednesday before the House Armed Services Committee, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said he consulted with the Navy and those officials did mention readiness and maintenance tradeoffs. "Multiple times the operational requirements — whether it was down in Southcom or up to Centcom — demanded additional assets in real time, which through a tough decision-making process led to an extension," Hegseth said, referring to US Southern Command, which oversees Latin America, and US Central Command in the Middle East. (AP)

## Activists say Israel has intercepted their Gaza aid flotilla near Crete, detaining crews

**ATHENS, April 30:** Activists sailing on dozens of boats attempting to break Israel's maritime blockade of the Gaza Strip to deliver humanitarian aid say Israeli forces intercepted them overnight Wednesday into Thursday, detaining the crews while the flotilla was sailing near the southern Greek island of Crete.

The Global Sumud Flotilla set sail earlier this month from Barcelona. Organisers have said more than 70 boats and 1,000 people from around the world would be participating, with more vessels joining the original boats as the flotilla sailed east across the Mediterranean. Their attempt comes less than a year after Israeli authorities foiled another effort by the activist group to reach Gaza.

"Israel's actions ... mark a dangerous and unprecedented escalation, the abduction of civilians in the middle of the Mediterranean, over 600 miles from Gaza, in full view of the world," the group said in a press release.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said in a post on X that it was taking about

175 activists from more than 20 boats participating in the flotilla to Israel.

Israel and Egypt have imposed varying degrees of a blockade on Gaza since Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007. Israel says the blockade is needed to prevent Hamas from importing arms, while critics say it amounts to collective punishment of Gaza's Palestinian population.

Turkey's foreign ministry condemned the seizure of the flotilla Thursday as "an act of piracy."

"By targeting the Global Sumud Flotilla, whose mission is to draw attention to the humanitarian catastrophe faced by the innocent people of Gaza, Israel has also violated humanitarian principles and international law," the ministry said in a statement.

Turkish foreign ministry spokesman Oncu Keceli wrote on X that Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan had discussed the raid over the phone with his Spanish counterpart Jose Manuel Albares Bueno. (AP)

## Germany faces new threat about reduced US military presence in Europe

**MUNSTER(GERMANY), April 30:** President Donald Trump has again threatened that the United States could reduce its military presence in Germany, a key NATO ally and the European Union's largest economy. Europeans have heard this before.

Trump's social media post on Wednesday followed comments by Chancellor Friedrich Merz that the US was being "humiliated" by Tehran as it slow-walks its diplomacy over the US-Israel war against Iran.

Trump has mused for years about reducing America's military presence in Germany, and has recently repeatedly railed against NATO for its refusal to assist the US in its two-month-old war.

**US military presence in Europe**

US allies at NATO have been waiting for the Trump administration to pull troops out since just after it came to office, warning that Europe would have to look after its own security, and that of Ukraine, in future.

Depending on operations, exercises and troop rotations, around 80,000-100,000 US personnel are usu-

ally stationed in Europe. NATO allies have expected that US troops deployed after Russia launched its war on Ukraine in 2022 would be first to leave.

Germany hosts several US military facilities, including the headquarters of its European and Africa commands, Ramstein Air Base and a medical center in Landstuhl, where casualties from US wars in places like Afghanistan and Iraq are treated. US nuclear missiles are also stationed in the country.

Ed Arnold, an expert in European security at the Royal United Services Institute in London, said the US gets a lot out of its presence in Germany — like logistics and support for Middle East combat operations — and was unlikely to withdraw.

Trump's post is most likely "bluster," he said.

"There is a difference between the military view and the political view," Arnold said. "The issue with some of these threats is that they are not quite as galling as they were a couple of years ago."

NATO and the German government did not immediately comment. (AP)

## NYC Mayor Mamdani says he would encourage King Charles to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond

**NEW YORK, April 30:** New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said he would encourage King Charles III to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond.

"If I was to speak to the King separately from that, I would probably encourage him to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond," Mamdani said at a press conference Wednesday before he met the British monarch in the city later in the day. Mamdani was asked what he would say to the King, who visited New York City on the second day of his State Visit to the US.

Hours later, Mamdani met King Charles at the 9/11 memorial, but it was not confirmed whether he discussed the Koh-i-Noor issue with the British monarch.

King Charles and Queen Camilla visited the 9/11 Memorial to pay their respects to the victims of the terror attack.

King Charles addressed a joint meeting of the US Congress Tues-



day, as he and Queen Camilla were honoured at a state dinner hosted by President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump in the White House.

They also visited Harlem Growth, a network of urban farms supporting children and families in Upper Manhattan.

The 105.6-carat Koh-i-Noor diamond was given to Queen Victoria in 1849 by Maharajah Duleep Singh. It was worn by the Queen Mother on her crown in 1937.

India has indicated that it will continue to explore ways to bring back the Koh-i-Noor from the United Kingdom.

The country has been raising the matter from time to time with the UK government and said it will continue to explore ways and means for obtaining a "satisfactory resolution of the matter."

The Koh-i-Noor diamond is currently displayed at the Tower of London.

The diamond, set within the Crown of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, has "many previous owners, including Mughal Emperors, Shahs of Iran, Emirs of Afghanistan, and Sikh Maharajas," according to the Historic Royal Palaces charity.

The 34-year-old Indian-descent Mamdani is the son of renowned filmmaker Mira Nair and Columbia University professor Mahmood Mamdani.

He is the first Muslim, the first Indian-origin, the first born in Africa, and the youngest one in more than a century to become the Mayor of New York. (PTI)

Union Minister to review ongoing projects and meet state leaders

## Kiren Rijiju arrives in Sikkim on three-day visit



**GANGTOK, April 30:** Union Minister for Parliamentary and Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju on Thursday arrived in Sikkim on a three-day visit during which he is scheduled to hold meetings with

state leaders and review ongoing projects, officials said.

Rijiju was received by state minister Sonam Lama and other dignitaries at Rangpo. The Union minister is scheduled to offer prayers at a Buddhist monastery on May 1 on the occasion of Buddha Purnima.

"He will also hold meetings with local leaders and review ongoing projects under the Ministry of Minority Affairs," an official said.

Upon his arrival, Rijiju underscored infrastructure progress in the Himalayan state, including improvements in road networks, rail connectivity, aviation and digital access over the past 12 years.

He said such developments have accelerated economic growth and strengthened connectivity across the northeast region.

Describing Sikkim as a "small yet prosperous" state, Rijiju said it continues to serve as a model of balanced development, expressing confidence that it will maintain the upward growth trajectory in the coming years. (PTI)

## CM Khemchand Singh urges Haj pilgrims to offer prayers for peace in Manipur



**IMPHAL, April 30:** Manipur Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh on Thursday urged Haj pilgrims from the state to offer prayers for peace and harmony in the northeastern state.

A total of 379 people have been selected this year by the Manipur State Haj Committee for the annual pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia.

Singh, while seeing off the Haj pilgrims at the Imphal airport, said, "I pray to the Almighty that they reach the destination safe and sound. I urge the pilgrims to offer prayers to establish a peaceful Manipur."

A total of 172 pilgrims left for Kolkata on Wednesday, while 207 devotees departed on Thursday for their onward journey to Saudi Arabia.

Singh had on Wednesday said that since assuming office in February, he has been engaging with MLAs, officials and members of different communities to work collectively for the restoration of peace in the state.

The CM said peace remains the foremost prerequisite for development, urging people to remain united in achieving lasting harmony. (PTI)

## Body of UP girl who fell in Meghalaya waterfall recovered

**SHILLONG, April 30:** The body of a 15-year-old girl from Uttar Pradesh who fell into a waterfall in Meghalaya's Sohra area while trying to take snaps a day ago was recovered on Thursday morning, officials said.

The girl had gone missing on Wednesday after she reportedly slipped while trying to take photographs and fell into one of the deep natural pools at the Wei Sawdong Falls, they said.

Search operations were conducted through Wednesday but were called off after sunset.

Around 7.30 AM on Thursday, locals spotted the body stuck between rocks near the waterfall, officials said. Following this, a joint team of Fire and Emergency Services and the Sohra Police recovered the body around 10 AM.

"Local village volunteers resumed the search early this morning and spotted the body, following which we recovered the body," a senior official told PTI. (PTI)

## NLUM hosts lecture on Himalayan exploration and comparative mountain research

**SHILLONG, April 30:** The National Law University of Meghalaya (NLUM) hosted Prof Emeritus Dr Hermann Kreutzmann, Chair of Human Geography at Freie Universität Berlin for a special lecture titled "From Himalayan Exploration to Comparative Mountain Research" at the APJ Abdul Kalam Auditorium on April 27.

The session was inaugurated by Dr Lavinia Mawlong, Assistant Professor, National Law University of Meghalaya, who laid the context of Prof Dr Kreutzmann's research and linked his work to the university's current courses on Comparative Development Perspectives and Migration. The distinguished panel for the discussion included Vice Chancellor in charge KM Lyngdoh Nongbri, MHJS, Registrar Prof Dr Baharul Islam, Dr S Erika Assumi, Assistant Professor, National Law University of Meghalaya and Sabine Felmy.

Prof Dr Kreutzmann recounted the historical foundation of mountain studies. His comparative framework sought to understand the genesis of the Himalayas and how human beings utilised diverse ecological zones.

He highlighted the 1850s expeditions of the Schlagintweit brothers, who successfully mapped the region by collaborating with native explorers like Nain Singh. The presentation also featured rare archival material, including visuals from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

Outlining directions for contemporary scholarship, he presented several frameworks for modern research and analysed mountain regions through two critical lenses of marginality and fragility.

The concluding discussion addressed issues of isolation and how modern law should reconcile static legal borders with the legal geographies of tribal communities. The event concluded with acknowledgement of the participation of students and faculty from five other academic institutions from Shillong. (NNN)

## TNL condemns attacks in Ukhrul, questions role of security forces

**IMPHAL, April 30:** The Working Committee of the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL) categorically condemned the "bomb attack at New Heaven village and the concurrent firing at civilian vehicles by Kuki militants since 3 AM on Thursday at TM Kasom" and the incessant attacks at Sinakeithi since late February. The Tangkhul Naga Long said "this biased and indifferent treatment meted out by the Indian security forces is appalling, to say the least".

On April 24, a single individual named Mercy Khongsai, Education secretary of Kuki Student Organisation (KSO) Ukhrul was escorted by Mahar Regiment/BSF into Mullaam, while numerous demands by Sinakeithi to provide more security forces at Sinakeithi have fallen on deaf ears, alleged the Tangkhul body. It also said an alleged combing operation at Lungter, where "Kuki terrorists" have made their stronghold for their onslaught against Sinakeithi was carried out by the Kangpokpi Police along with the security forces on April 28, 2026. On that

very evening, Sinakeithi came under attack by Kuki militants, it also said. "How can we, then, trust the central security forces that their intentions are to bring order?" the TNL asked.

On too many occasions, according to the TNL, the central security forces have wielded their power to harass women and mothers protecting their land and destroy civilian defence shelters instead of using their powers to deal with the "true aggressors" (Kuki militants, SoO and non-SoO groups).

The TNL then said that numerous incidents that have transpired in the last two months in Ukhrul have all but proven one thing: that the central security forces have betrayed the trust of Naga civilians. "As such, multiple demands have been made for the central security forces to be replaced by the state forces. These demands and grievances have not been heeded nor acknowledged, clearly hinting at the dishonesty of the central government and the MHA in handling the burning issue", it added. (NNN)

## State-level mock drill in disaster management held in Nagaland

**HT Correspondent**  
**DIMAPUR, April 30:** A state-level mock drill on earthquake and extreme weather disaster management was held across districts in Nagaland on Thursday.

The mock drill was organised by the Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority and District Disaster Management Agency, in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA).

During a press conference, after the mock drill, Nagaland home commissioner Abhijit Sinha said the mock drill was a test to check the efficiency of the departments and the public to manage disasters in the state.

He added that the drill was to create awareness, improve the management, learn and understand the actual scenario of a major earthquake and extreme weather disaster and how to handle them.

Lead consultant (mock exercise & incident response systems), NDMA, Maj Gen Sudhir Bahl stated that disasters can never be one hundred per cent managed, but they can always be improved.

He appealed to the telecom department and the other service providers to coordinate and work as a team, saying some areas which are very important during a disaster are communication.

Bahl also spoke on the safety of petrol pumps, saying substantial fire safety materials and equipment should be provided to them.

"School safety was another important area where maximum exercises should be taken up," he added.

Bahl said the medical teams should be prepared all the time to provide extra medical equipment and also to keep coordinating with the neighbouring states in times of emergency.

## Manipur Deputy CM calls for unity to restore peace, urges public cooperation

*Dikho has called for coordination between the govt and public for development in the state*



**IMPHAL, April 30:** Amid a grim situation in Manipur due to ethnic problems, Deputy Chief Minister of Manipur L. Dikho said peace is "achievable through unity and coordination between the government and the public." Dikho urged civil society organisations and the public to work together to maintain peace and harmony. He said hatred and division will only harm the state and delay progress.

L. Dikho was speaking at the launching of development projects in Langthabal Assembly constituency in Imphal.

## Nagaland Police launches Centralised Monitoring Centre to boost urban traffic policing

**DIMAPUR, April 30:** In a move to modernise road traffic management in Nagaland's Dimapur, a centralised monitoring centre was inaugurated on Thursday.

Under this project, 14 CCTV cameras and Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras at four congested locations - Dhoobinala, Tragopan, Purana Bazaar and Nagarjan have been installed.

Inaugurating the project at East Police Station, Dimapur Commissioner of Police, Aotula T Imchen said the authorities seek to unplug the heavily congested locations in Dimapur, one of the largest cities in Nagaland.

The move is a strategic effort to improve traffic flow and significantly reduce air pollution levels caused by vehicular emissions in high-traffic zones, she said.

The project has been funded by the Ministry of En-

vironment, Forest and Climate Change under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). Imchen said this initiative will enable better traffic flow by allowing traffic personnel to respond quickly and thereby reducing vehicle emissions caused by congestion.

This project lays the foundation for adopting smart traffic technologies in the future, leading to more efficient and advanced traffic management.

Deputy Commissioner of Dimapur, Dr Tinojongshi Chang, appealed to the public to cooperate with the administration in the effective use of newly installed safety equipment.

He noted that the technology will significantly assist the police and district administration in detecting crime and identifying traffic violators, ultimately leading to improved road safety across the district. (PTI)

## Abu Mehta stressed to boost development and improve CSR implementation in Nagaland

# IDAN chairman calls for stronger partnerships to unlock Nagaland's full potential

**KOHIMA, April 30:** Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) chairman Abu Mehta on Thursday called for stronger collaboration among government, corporate and civil society to unlock Nagaland's full potential.

Addressing participants at the inauguration of a two-day Capacity Building Training on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and compliance with the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, Mehta, also Advisor to the Chief Minister, stressed that Nagaland, strategically located along the India-Myanmar border, has the potential to emerge as a gateway to Southeast Asia under India's Act East policy.

He said the state can play a key role in connecting economic regions and driving growth, provided institutions work together in a coordinated manner.

Calling for a 'Team Nagaland' approach, he urged all stakeholders to collaborate in bringing development to the grassroots, particularly in remote and underserved areas facing connectivity and infrastructure chal-



lenges. He highlighted that while urban centres in the state have seen progress, interior regions

## 4 substandard food products found in Dimapur zone



**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, April 30:** Four food products were found to be substandard after the food safety administration, Dimapur zone, carried out routine surveillance and laboratory testing conducted under the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) Act, 2006.

Dimapur, Niuland, Chümoukedima, Mon and Peren districts fall under the food safety administration, Dimapur zone.

Legal proceedings against the sellers involved have been initiated. Designated officer of food safety administration, Dimapur zone, Pelerieno Kehie, in a release, said the products - a multi-source edible oil, sterilised paneer, vinegar and refined soybean oil - were collected from retail outlets across Dimapur, Niuland, Chümoukedima, Mon and Peren districts and found to have failed mandatory quality benchmarks.

The four products are DATA Mast Health Multi-source Edible Oil (370 gms, Batch No BMMS-69, manufactured November 9, 2025, expiry July 8, 2026); JK Diary Top Paneer Sterilised (450 gms, Batch No 300PA25, manufactured October 27, 2025, expiry July 26, 2026); William's Vinegar (350 ml, Batch No 105, manufactured November 2025, best before 24 months) and Shreeji Refined Soybean Oil (375 gms, Batch No OPG30, manufactured September 30, 2025, expiry June 29, 2026).

Under the FSSAI Act, 2006, a food item is classified as "substandard" when it fails to meet the prescribed standards but not so as to render the article of food unsafe.

"It is important for consumers to distinguish between substandard food (low quality) and unsafe food (harmful/toxic). While these items may not cause immediate illness, they represent a violation of consumer trust and regulatory requirements," Kehie stressed.

Any person found manufacturing, storing, selling or importing substandard food for human consumption is liable for a penalty of up to ₹ 5 lakh, he said.

Kehie said unsafe food, which poses a direct risk to health, carries much stricter penalties, including heavy fines and imprisonment.

The retailers concerned have been directed to remove the specific lots from their shelves immediately, while consumers were advised to check their pantries for the batch numbers listed above.

still require focused attention to ensure inclusive growth.

Mehta called for dedicated CSR cells in key government departments, especially in health, education and social sectors, to actively engage with corporates and attract development projects.

He noted that while CSR offers immense opportunities, challenges such as project pitching, compliance and documentation continue to hinder effective implementation.

Mehta also pointed to the potential of FCRA as a channel for foreign funding, while stressing the need for transparency, accountability and professionalism to prevent misuse and ensure impact.

Earlier, Additional Secretary of the Finance Department, Vineet Kumar, described the programme as timely, noting that CSR is no longer just charity but a tool for social transformation.

He stressed the importance of strengthening institutional capacity to match growing partnerships between government, corporates and NGOs.

Manager of HCL Foundation, Rahul Kumar, highlighted that compliance knowledge is critical for accessing funds, stating that without proper understanding of regulations, funding cannot be realised even if opportunities exist.

Deputy Director of the Ministry of Home Affairs, O.P. Singh, underscored the importance of NGOs as last-mile delivery mechanisms for development programmes and emphasised the need for accountability and regulatory awareness.

The training programme is organised by the IDAN in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the HCL Foundation. It aims to strengthen institutional capacity and equip stakeholders with the knowledge required to effectively engage with CSR frameworks and regulatory compliances.

The two-day programme brings together experts and participants from 15 government departments, with a focus on improving efficiency, enhancing compliance and ensuring that development initiatives reach the last mile in Nagaland. (PTI)

# India's IT is 'Information Technology', Pak's is 'International Terrorism': Rajnath

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** Terrorism emanates from a "distorted and perverse" mindset, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday, describing the battle against it as a fundamental fight to safeguard core values of humanity rather than merely a national security concern.

Highlighting the shift in India's approach to fight terrorism, Singh said that Operation Sindoor sent an "unequivocal" global message that India is no longer bound by the "old mindset" of issuing only diplomatic statements after terror attacks.

The remarks were seen as an indirect criticism of the previous UPA government. Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government has moved beyond mere intent and rhetoric by demonstrating its unwavering commitment through "decisive action", he said in an address at an event, according to the defence ministry.

On Pakistan's continuous support to terrorism, Singh said: "Both, India and Pakistan attained independence at the same time. However, today India is recognised globally for IT that is 'Information Technology', while Pakistan is regarded as the epicenter of a different IT that is 'International Terrorism'".

He described Operation Sindoor as a "shining example" of jointness and synergy of the Indian defence forces.

The Indian Army, Indian Navy, and Indian Air Force acted in concert and under a unified plan, conclusively demonstrating that India's military might no longer operates in silos; instead, it has emerged as a joint, integrated, and global power, the ministry quoted him as saying.

The defence minister asserted that the Modi government has maintained a firm stance that any act of terrorism, under any circum-



stances, will not be tolerated.

"Terrorism emanates from a distorted and perverse mindset. It casts a dark stain on humanity. The battle against terrorism is not merely a matter of national security; it is, fundamentally, a battle to safeguard the core values of humanity," he said.

"It is a fight against a barbaric ideology that stands in direct opposition to every human value. We have articulated this Indian perspective, both within the country and abroad," he said.

Singh's comments came a day after the Congress alleged that he gave a "shameful clean chit" to Pakistan as it took strong exception to the defence minister's remarks at a multilateral conclave in Bishkek. The Congress particularly objected to the defence minister's comments in Bishkek on Tuesday that: "We must not forget that terrorism has no nationality and no theology. No grievance, real or supposed, can become an excuse for terrorism and humanitarian loss." "Is Pakistan not the epicentre of terrorism. Are there no terrorist camps in Pakistan with India as their target," Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh.

In his remarks on Thursday,

Singh said as long as terrorism exists, it will continue to challenge collective peace, development, and prosperity.

"Attempts are made to justify terrorism by giving it a religious colour or linking it to a violent ideology such as Naxalism. This is extremely dangerous and, in a way, provides cover fire to terrorists so they can slowly advance toward their goal," he said.

"Terrorism is not just an anti-national act; it has multiple dimensions - operational, ideological, and political. It can only be dealt with if we tackle all these dimensions," he added.

The defence minister added that India executed Operation Sindoor on its own terms and at a time of its own choosing, and halted it strictly on its own terms.

"During the course of the operation, we targeted, with absolute precision, only those who had perpetrated the attack against us. We did not halt the operation because our capabilities had been exhausted or diminished," he said.

"We halted it entirely on our own terms. We were fully prepared to sustain a prolonged conflict. We possess the requisite surge capacity, and the inherent strength to rapidly scale up our ca-

pabilities in moments of sudden crisis," he said.

Singh noted that India's military-industrial complex has consistently demonstrated, time and again, that it stands ready to meet not only the requirements of peacetime, but also the demands for rapid supply and logistics during times of war.

He asserted that, during that period, India did not fall for the bluff or a threat of a nuclear strike and accomplished the set objectives.

"This is the 'New World Order': the 'New India' of this new global era. This is an India which makes no distinction between terrorism and those who sponsor it. This is the unequivocal policy of our prime minister, which has transformed India amidst the shifting global landscape," he said.

Describing Operation Sindoor as an embodiment of deterrence, the defence minister stated that although it was concluded within a span of just 72 hours, the preparatory work preceding it was extensive and protracted. He pointed out that India's surge capacity and its ability to rapidly mobilise resources, strategic stockpiles, and the proven credibility of indigenously-developed weaponry have all become integral components of deterrence posture.

Singh added that a "remarkable shift" in global perception and a positive attitude towards the reliability of India's indigenous weapons and defence products are being witnessed, as a direct result of Operation Sindoor.

"Numerous nations have expressed keen interest in procuring weapons and defence equipment from India. The figures say it all. In the Financial Year 2025-26, defence exports reached a record high of ₹ 38,424 crore, a staggering surge of 62.66 per cent compared to the previous fiscal year," he said. (PTI)

## Ahead of Op Sindoor anniversary Defence firms pitch for developing more indigenous tech, systems

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** A year from India's Operation Sindoor, the "atmanirbhar" ecosystem being fostered by the government is "getting stronger" and the country's private sector in defence needs to move in consonance with that vision, several defence firms said.

They also pitched for developing more indigenous systems and technologies, including those related to communication, so that sensitive data linked with national security "remain under Indian control". From missiles to air defence system, several of India's home-grown platforms and technologies were used during the military operation in May 2025, conducted in retaliation to the deadly Pahalagam terror attack on April 22 last year.

As the armed forces gear up to mark the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor, many defence firms working in the field of drone and anti-drone technologies, cyber intelligence, counter-infiltration capabilities underlined the ecosystem of self-reliance being built in the defence sector and the role the private entities can play to strengthen the vision.

Lakshay Talwar, CEO of CST Cyber & Defence, a defence firm which also works in cyber defence capabilities, said he viewed "Operation Sindoor as a powerful affirmation of India's resolve against terrorism and our rapidly advancing technological edge".

It underlined the decisive impact that Indian cyber intelligence, counter-infiltration capabilities and precise anti-drone responses can have when government, security forces and industry work with a "shared purpose", he said.

"In just one year, India has demonstrated an exceptional ability not only to absorb global technological developments, but to outperform them in semiconduc-



tors, cyber security and defence innovation," the top official of the defence firm was quoted as saying in a statement issued ahead of the first anniversary of the operation.

The ecosystem being built by the government of India is "strong and getting stronger," he said, adding, "the responsibility now lies with private industry, institutions and the armed forces to move in lock-step and deliver robust communications for denied environments, advanced weapon and air-defence systems, and AI-enabled robotics that deter and disrupt any adversary". The logical next step is a push for "fully indigenous video management platforms and command and control solutions for all security forces" to bolster national security, Talwar said.

Just as the armed forces stand shoulder-to-shoulder in times of conflict, India's cyber, defence and aerospace companies, and their leaders, "must stand united to provide the most resilient, sovereign and future-ready systems first to our own government, and then to partners across the world," he added. Many other defence firms expressed similar views and also pitched for greater 'Atmanirbharta'

in defence sector with private sector playing a complementary role to advance the vision.

Indian government too has been maintaining that private companies and start-up firms need to build more cutting-edge platforms and deliver technologies within stipulated timeline to address the needs of the country's armed forces, so that they don't need to look for technologies and systems from foreign firms. Homegrown technology company, IG Drones, in February had said that it had bagged an order from the defence ministry to supply high-altitude drones and essential accessories for surveillance purposes in difficult terrains.

The defence firm had in January said that it had "secured orders" from the Army and the Indian Navy for its indigenously developed anti-drone system that is aimed at bolstering their capabilities to disrupt and neutralise hostile drones and counter emerging aerial threats. Lightweight and rapidly deployable, the IG T-Shul Pulse Anti-Drone System is intended for frontline troops, perimeter security, and the protection of military bases and "critical strategic assets," it has said. (PTI)

## Shah in Ladakh to attend first-ever exposition of Buddha relics in India

**LEH, April 30:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah arrived in Ladakh on Thursday to attend the first-ever international exposition of holy relics of Lord Buddha in India, officials said.

Shah was received by Ladakh Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena and accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Kushok Bakula Rimpochee Airport here. Senior officials of the police and civil administration were also present. During his two-day visit, Shah will pay respect to the sacred relics of Lord Buddha on the Buddha Purnima, which falls on Friday.

He will also lay foundation stone for a 10 TLPD (thousand litres per day) capacity dairy plant in Kargil and attend other dairy-related programmes. In an X post on Wednesday, Shah said it was a moment of profound good fortune for him. "It is a moment of profound good fortune for me to be attending on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, the first ever international exposition of the holy relics of Lord Buddha, commencing on the 1st of May," he said.

"In this exposition, devotees from different parts of the world will offer veneration to the relics of Lord Buddha," he added.

The sacred Piprahwa relics of Buddha were brought to Leh in a special Indian Air Force aircraft on Wednesday by Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche and Khenpo Thinlas Chosal of Matho Monastery.

The sacred relics were accorded a ceremonial reception on arrival,

with people pouring out of their homes and gathering along the roads to pay respect. The exposition to be held in the first two weeks of May marks the beginning of a rare and significant spiritual occasion in the Union Territory of Ladakh. Piprahwa relics refer to the ancient remains and associated objects linked to Gautama Buddha, discovered at Piprahwa, an archaeological site in the present-day Uttar Pradesh, near the Nepal border. The relics have gained renewed global significance in recent years, especially after a collection of associated gems and offerings was repatriated to India in July 2025 from a British family and a private collection, ending over a century of colonial possession.

The relics have been exhibited internationally in several countries; this is the first time they have been brought out from their original place of preservation for exposition within India.

The Piprahwa relics have previously been exhibited in countries such as Thailand, Mongolia, Vietnam, Russia, Singapore, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, attracting global attention and devotion, according to an official statement.

In Ladakh, the relics will be open for public veneration at Jivetsal from May 2 to 10. They will subsequently be taken to Zanskar on May 11 and 12, followed by exposition at the Dharma Centre in Leh from May 13 to 14, before being returned to Delhi on May 15, it read. (PTI)

## To hit USD 30 trillion mark by 2047, India needs 12 pc growth: Chief Economic Advisor

**CHENNAI, April 30:** Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran on Thursday said India can achieve a 30 trillion dollar economy by the centenary year of its Independence, provided the country masters the challenge of technological progress and frontier research.

"To hit the USD 30 trillion mark by 2047, the country would require about 12 per cent growth (year-on-year) in dollar terms," Nageswaran said.

He noted that the current GDP stands at approximately USD 3.91 trillion and is expected to reach USD 7.8 trillion within the next six years.

Speaking as the chief guest at the 67th Institute Day celebrations of the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, Nageswaran highlighted that such a goal is doable but requires a deep understanding of the challenges present in a fraught geopolitical environment.

Frugal innovation, he pointed out, is India's strength. "But the important point is we have to remember that we have to keep at it for the next generation," he added.

"We have to generate frontier research in science and engineering. India's universities and labs must be at the cutting-edge of the global knowledge ecosystem. We have to develop the capacity to acquire exter-



nal technology and adapt it to Indian conditions, scale and cost constraints," Nageswaran said.

He called for Indian universities and laboratories to remain at the cutting edge of the global knowledge ecosystem, developing the capacity to acquire and adapt external technology to local conditions, scale, and cost constraints. He added that moving from pilot projects to patents and economy-wide productivity gains in agriculture, manufacturing, and services is the primary challenge where premier institutes like IIT Madras play a vital role.

The event, which was also attended by faculty, students, and alumni, served as a platform to honour extraordinary achievers. Among the alumni recognised during the ceremony were Srinivas Narayanan,

Chief Technology Officer of OpenAI, and Aravind Srinivas, Co-Founder and CEO of Perplexity.ai.

Other prominent awardees included D K Sunil, Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, and professors from international universities.

IIT Madras Director Prof V Kamakoti, delivering the presidential address, noted that the institute has been ranked as the number one engineering institution in the country for ten consecutive years from 2016 to 2025 in the NIRF rankings.

He highlighted the launch of IITM Global as a defining milestone, reflecting a vision to establish the institution as the world's first multinational university. The international expansion includes the establishment of a campus in Zanzibar, Tanzania, in 2023.

Several academic and research awards were presented during the occasion, including the Srimali Marti Annapurna Gurunath Award for Excellence in Teaching to Prof Srinivasa Rao and Prof Dhiman Chatterjee. The Institute Research and Development Awards for 2025-26 were conferred upon Dr Nagabhushana Rao Vadlamani and Prof Bobby George for their contributions to their respective fields. (PTI)

## Maharashtra council polls: Shiv Sena names Neelam Gorhe, Bacchu Kadu as its candidates

**MUMBAI, April 30:** The ruling Shiv Sena in Maharashtra on Thursday fielded sitting MLC Dr Neelam Gorhe and newly-inducted former MLA Bacchu Kadu as its candidates for next month's state legislative council elections.

Gorhe is currently the deputy chairperson of the legislative council. Her term as a member of House is set to end on May 13.

Kadu, who heads the Prahar Janshakti Paksh (PIP), joined the Shiv Sena in the presence of Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde here. His candidature for the council polls was announced soon after that.

Speaking to reporters here, Shinde said the party has decided to nominate Gorhe and Kadu as they have a long record of public service.

"Both Dr Gorhe and Bacchu Kadu have vast experience in social work and have consistently raised issues concerning the people. We have fielded them as Shiv Sena candidates for the MLC elections," he said. Nine council members, including Shiv Sena (UBT) president and former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, are retiring on May 13.

Polling for these nine seats and a bypoll to one seat in the council will be held on May 12. The deadline for nomination filing is 3 pm on Thursday.

Kadu had left the then-undivided Shiv Sena in 1999 and went on to establish the PIP in Amravati district of the Vidarbha region. He won the legislative assembly elections four times, but lost the 2024 polls.

Following his defeat, Kadu led a major agitation in the Vidarbha region demanding a crop loan waiver for farmers, a demand that was later accepted by the government led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis ahead of the council elections.

Before joining the Shiv Sena on Thursday, Kadu said, "I am joining Shiv Sena for the welfare of farmers, divyang and youth in the state. I want to see Shinde at the top position in the state again. Wherever it is possible, we will field Shiv Sena workers to contest polls and strengthen the party." (PTI)

## Murder suspect held after encounter in northwest Delhi

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** A murder suspect who allegedly uses minors to execute violent crimes was arrested after a brief encounter with police in northwest Delhi's Ashok Vihar area, officials said.

The accused, identified as Suraj (26) alias Kake alias Kana, was apprehended near Prembari Pul early Wednesday, they said. He was wanted in a murder case registered a day earlier.

According to police, when signalled to stop, the accused abandoned the vehicle and attempted to escape. "He suddenly turned back and fired at the police team at close range. The bullet hit the bulletproof jacket of a head constable, narrowly averting a serious injury," a senior officer said.

Police said the accused attempted to fire again, but his weapon malfunctioned, following which the team fired a warning shot and then shot him in the leg to neutralise the threat before apprehending him. He was later taken to hospital for treatment. A country-made pistol, one live cartridge, empty shells and a stolen scooter were recovered from the spot, police said, adding that a separate case under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Arms Act has been registered.

The arrest is linked to a murder case reported on April 29, when a group of assailants attacked two men near a Mother Dairy booth in Wazirpur Industrial Area following a quarrel. One of the victims, Deepak, sustained stab injuries and later succumbed at hospital.

Police said Suraj allegedly instigated a juvenile to carry out the stabbing, exploiting legal leniency for minors. Several other accused, including the juvenile in conflict with law, have been detained and are being questioned. (PTI)

**CHANDIGARH, April 30:** Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Thursday said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country has taken a long leap forward across all sectors, particularly in the healthcare sector, in its journey toward realising a 'Viksit Bharat'.

"If I were to speak of these initiatives, I would highlight the strengthening of our health systems, of course in the areas of science, innovation, and technology," Nadda said while addressing the 10th National Summit on Good and Replicable Practices and Innovations in Public Health Systems here.

"We have taken a long leap in the last decade under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Modi, and many new initiatives that we have taken," he said. Nadda said above all is the policy which he frequently refers to, is the comprehensive health policy of 2017.

If we talk about the health policy which was initiated in 1997-98, was a curative health policy, which had been in place for a long time.

The focus was on curative part, he said.

But in 2017, when we came out with a new policy that was a comprehensive, holistic and inclusive policy, he said.

It has prevention, promotion, curative part, rehabilitative part and geriatric part, he added.

On this occasion, Nadda launched Swasth Bharat Janani portal, compendium on best practices, integrated training modules for primary healthcare team and Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK-2.0).

Speaking about the Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Health and Wellness Centers), Nadda said around 1.85 lakh such centres have been set up which are the first contact point that connect 1.40 billion people.

"Our effort is to keep in mind the prevention part. Whether it is hypertension, diabetes, oral cancer, breast cancer, or cervical cancer, we have mandated screening for all these conditions at the age of 30," said the health minister.

He further said due consideration to the Mother and Child



Health programme has been given, under which we provide a comprehensive package of 12 services.

"We have expanded Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and now the time for consolidation so that we provide quality support and get quality outcome and this necessitates capacity building," said Nadda.

He informed that out of approximately 1.85 lakh centres, the National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS) have been implemented

in 50,000 centres.

"However, we should not feel satisfied and happy. Still a larger task is left which we have to do," he said.

"We should do continuously audit and we must also develop methodologies of audit to assess the performance and functioning of our 'Ayushman Arogya Mandirs'," he said.

The Union health minister further informed about the mother

and child health programme, saying the rate of institutional deliveries has risen from 79 per cent to 89 per cent.

It is a good increase but we should not become complacent, he added.

Referring to the UN report of 2025, he said Under-5 Mortality Rate has dropped by 79 per cent, while the Infant mortality rate declined by 73 per cent.

On the World Health Organization's (WHO)'s 'World Malaria Report', he said India accounts for one-sixth of the global population and malaria cases were detected in just 0.7 per cent people.

Speaking about the summit, Nadda said it demonstrates the strategic potential for creating an effective health system under the aegis of the National Health Mission.

It is, undoubtedly, a highly effective and practical platform that we all utilize, he added.

On this occasion, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, Haryana health minister Arti Singh Rao and other senior officers were also present. (PTI)

'People to vote without fear of Didi's goons'

# Vaishnav flags off Jammu-Srinagar Vande Bharat Express, promises rail link to Uri

**SRINAGAR, April 30:** As the first direct Vande Bharat Express from Jammu chugged into the Kashmir valley on Thursday, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav promised to focus on connecting remote areas like Poonch, Rajouri and Uri to the country's rail network.

Following the completion of the ambitious Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL), Vaishnav said detailed project reports (DPRs) have been prepared on projects to connect the Poonch-Rajouri region to the national rail network and to extend the railway line to Uri, a border town in Baramulla district.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Jitendra Singh, were among the dignitaries present at the flagging off ceremony.

The direct train services between Srinagar and Jammu will reduce travel time between the twin capitals of Jammu and Kashmir, and boost tourism, besides providing an all-weather surface transport link.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the first direct train service between Katra and Srinagar on June 6, 2025. This service has now been extended up to the Jammu Tawi Railway Station.

The work on the ₹ 43,780-crore rail project, linking Kashmir to the rest of the country, began in the

late 1990s, with the first train operating in the Kashmir Valley in October 2008.

Talking to reporters after the flagging off ceremony, Vaishnav said the government will focus on connecting the Poonch-Rajouri region with the rail network of the country, besides working on a rail link to Uri.

"We will now focus on connecting Poonch and Rajouri with rail connectivity. We will also take up a project to connect Uri with the train," the minister said after the flagging off ceremony.

"The DPRs for these projects have been made, and we will try to get work started soon," he added. On the Jammu-Srinagar Vande Bharat Express, the railway minister called it a major landmark achievement, which has become the lifeline of Jammu and Kashmir.

"This train service is a major landmark for people of Jammu and Kashmir. The prime minister inaugurated this train service between Katra and Kashmir last year. This train is very popular with 100 per cent occupancy and has become a lifeline for Jammu and Kashmir," Vaishnav said.

He said there was a huge demand for increasing the passenger-carrying capacity of the train.

"The eight coaches ran at 100 per cent occupancy, and there was demand to increase the capacity. Now, it has been made into a 20-



coach train," he said, and noted that the train service benefited the people of Kashmir as it has been used for ferrying goods like cement, cars and bikes.

"I have been told that the prices of cement have dropped by ₹ 50 (per bag). Around 2 crore kg (20,000 tons) of apples and other fruits have been transported through train to other parts of the country," he said.

Vaishnav said the Vande Bharat Express between Jammu and Srinagar can operate in all weather conditions.

"We can run this train in minus 10 degrees Celsius. You saw there was one foot of snow last winter,

but the trains still operated. The design of this train incorporates all facilities and advanced features for passenger comfort, making it an all-weather train," he said.

The minister said this is the first time that a train is being operated at such a high altitude. "This train will facilitate the easy movement of fruits, goods and all other items."

CM Abdullah, while thanking the Railways Minister and the Centre for extending Vande Bharat train services between Jammu and Srinagar.

"I want to congratulate and thank Vaishnav and, through him, the central government, on behalf

of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, for connecting Jammu with Kashmir through rail," Abdullah said, addressing a gathering during the flagging-off ceremony from the Jammu railway station.

Highlighting the railway connectivity's trade benefits, he said goods like cement and cars can be transported, giving a huge boost to business and trade.

"The speciality of this train is that it has not only enabled people like us to travel but has also facilitated the transport of goods such as cement. I was surprised to see Maruti cars being transported to Srinagar and fruits from Kashmir by rail," he said.

Abdullah also appealed to the railways minister to set up an inland port in Jammu and Kashmir to ease customs clearance for exporting goods from the union territory.

"I have a request for the railways minister, even as it does not pertain to his ministry, but since he has the goodwill, he can use that. I request that an inland port be set up in J&K.

"There is an urgent need for a dry port here so that we do not require customs clearance in other cities for our goods, which we want to export from here. The customs clearance should take place here in J&K, it will benefit our trade and business," the CM added.

Abdullah said that while he would raise the issue with the Cen-

tre, he appealed to the union ministers and the MPs present there to take up the matter with the government.

Talking about the significance of the railway connectivity between Srinagar and Jammu, the CM said the people of J&K had been waiting for it for many years.

"For so many years, we had been waiting to travel by train from Jammu to Srinagar. Now, there is no need for us to travel to Katra from Jammu and the other way around via road," he said.

Abdullah said he had never expected the railway line to become so popular that he would have to seek favours to reserve seats on the train.

"Thankfully, now it (train) has been changed from eight bogeys to 20 and while 500 passengers used to travel earlier, now 1,400 people can travel (at once). This is a huge thing for us," he added.

Jitendra Singh said the direct train service between the twin capitals of Jammu and Kashmir will propel economic growth in the union territory, besides making travel easy for tourists and pilgrims.

"We express our gratitude to the PM. It was due to his efforts that the train between Jammu and Katra became a reality after 42 years, and the direct train between Jammu and Srinagar has now been started," he added. (PTI)

## Cong has right to seek one RS seat in Jharkhand from JMM: K Raju

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** The Congress has the right to seek one Rajya Sabha seat in Jharkhand from the JMM and the top leadership will soon speak with Chief Minister Hemant Soren about it, AICC Jharkhand in-charge K Raju said on Thursday.

Raju said that in the last three Rajya Sabha elections, there was one seat for taking in the state and the JMM took it each time.

"This time we have the numbers for two seats, so we have the right to request one seat. At the highest level, we will speak with Hemant Soren ji soon and request for it," Raju told PTI. There are two Rajya Sabha seats up for grabs for the ruling alliance, with Jharkhand Mukti Morcha founder (JMM) Shibu Soren having passed away last year and BJP's Deepak Prakash set to retire in June this year.

The Hemant Soren-led ruling alliance in Jharkhand has 56 MLAs in the 81-member assembly.

After the JMM, which has 34 MLAs in the House, the Congress is the biggest partner in the coalition with 16 legislators.

On reports of tensions between the JMM and the Congress in running the government in Jharkhand, Raju said there are two aspects to it and at the party level, there are no problems in ties between the two parties. "We regularly meet Hemant Soren ji, there is coordination as well. Whenever he calls an MLAs' meeting, he invites the AICC in-charge and I go there. There is no problem," Raju said.

But on issues of the people where the administration has failed to deliver justice, the Congress has decided that it will not keep quiet just because it is part of the government, he said.

"We have decided that we will stand by the people and make the administration respond to the people's issues. We will take up people's issues. What are the issues of the people? There are issues of land acquisition, displacement, mining lobby. On all these issues, we will hold the administration accountable," he said.

This will help the government perform better and will also be good for the alliance, he said. This is creating an impression that all is not well between these two parties, but at an ideological and party level, the two are fine, he added.

Raju accused the BJP of using the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls to disenfranchise SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities. He asserted that as AICC Jharkhand in-charge, he has taken several steps to prepare the people for the SIR and ensure that not a single vote is cut mischievously in the state. "In Jharkhand, tribals voted for the JMM or the Congress, they did not vote much for the BJP. So, the BJP is definitely going to target tribals and delete their votes because that way they can improve their prospects of winning many constituencies," Raju claimed.

"Therefore, our focus is that not a single tribal vote is deleted. We are going to take care of that," he said. "Regarding the SIR issue, I want to categorically state that it is unconstitutional, and people's names have been removed from the voter lists in an illegal manner," Raju said.

The SIR is nothing but a conspiracy to disenfranchise a large number of voters, he alleged.

In Jharkhand, tribal communities will face the greatest difficulties as they often lack proper documentation and there is large-scale migration, he said. "In light of this, we have been preparing for the SIR exercise for the past six months. While we oppose the SIR exercise itself, we are simultaneously striving to ensure that not a single name of our voters is struck off the rolls," he said. (PTI)

**NEW DELHI** Rajya Sabha Monday said off and alleged away Rajya

Senior Cor Aam Aadmi BJP to count Gujarat. "Ho MPs have n cent of votes gress treasur

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## Vietnam Prez Lam to visit India next week to fortify ties amid rising regional tensions

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** Vietnamese President To Lam will undertake a three-day visit to India next week to further fortify bilateral ties in areas of defence, trade and critical technologies against the backdrop of increasing geopolitical upheavals and trade disruptions.

Lam, who also serves as General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, will lead a high-level delegation of ministers and top executives during his state visit to India from May 5 to 7. It will be his first state visit to India after being elected as the president this month.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Lam will hold wide-ranging talks that are expected to focus on boosting the overall trajectory of the India-Vietnam comprehensive strategic partnership with a focus on enhancing ties in trade, defence and critical technologies.

The visiting leader will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan on May 6, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, announcing the visit.

"Prime Minister Modi will hold wide-ranging discussions with President To Lam across the spectrum of bilateral relations as also on regional and global issues of mutual interest," it said.

The two leaders are also likely to deliberate on the prevailing situation West Asia, and South China Sea, a region that has witnessed increasing Chinese military muscle-flexing.

There have been growing concerns over China's sweeping claims of sovereignty over all of the South China Sea, a huge source of hydrocarbons. Several countries in the region including Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei, have counterclaims. (PTI)

## SC appoints ex-CJI Sanjiv Khanna as mediator for resolving dispute involving Surat-based businessman

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** The Supreme Court on Thursday appointed former chief justice of India Sanjiv Khanna as sole mediator to resolve a dispute involving prominent businessman Ashokbhai Haribhai Gajera and others in a case linked to textile market projects at Surat.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi was hearing an appeal filed by Gajera and two others against the March 11 order of the Gujarat High Court.

The high court had dismissed a batch of petitions filed by Gajera and others seeking to quash an FIR involving allegations of siphoning off ₹ 1,900 crore and forging documents to illegally reduce a partner's shareholding. The CJI-led bench heard the arguments advanced by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi on behalf of Gajera assailing the high court verdict.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Praveen Deokinandan Agrawal who was allegedly defrauded by Gajera and others, opposed the submissions and said that various documents were forged for siphoning funds to the tune of ₹ 1,900 crore.

However, both parties agreed to the suggestion of the bench that they should attempt to resolve the dispute through mediation.

Taking note of the consent, the bench asked former CJI Khanna to act as sole mediator in the case. The bench asked the lawyers to appear before Justice Khanna who will decide the future course of action and his fees which would be borne equally by both the parties.

In February 2026, an FIR was registered with the DCB Police Station, Surat, and Gajera and others were charged under various sections of the IPC for offences of criminal breach of trust, forgery, using forged documents, and criminal conspiracy. (PTI)

## Minor's pregnancy: Amend law on pregnancy termination of rape survivors, says SC

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** A minor child cannot be forced to bear a pregnancy, the Supreme Court said on Thursday while pulling up the Centre and asking it to amend the law to permit rape survivors to terminate unwanted pregnancies even beyond 20 weeks.

In a ruling with far reaching implications for rape survivors, including children, and the issue of autonomy over their bodies, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took strong exception to a plea by AIIMS seeking to set aside the apex court order allowing a 15-year-old girl to medically terminate her 30-week pregnancy.

"Please amend your law that when there is pregnancy due to rape etc, then time limitation will not be there. The law needs to be organic and in sync evolving times. Also amend the law so that such trials are completed within a week. Why should the child suffer the pending trauma of the trial also," the CJI said.

The court said in its impassioned observations that this is a case of child rape and the survivor will have a lifelong scar and trauma if termination is not allowed. If the mother does not have permanent disability, termination should be carried out, it said. "This is a curative petition. Unwanted pregnancy cannot be thrust on a person. Imagine... she is a child. She



should be studying now. But we want to make her a mother. Imagine the pain, the humiliation the child has suffered in this," the bench said.

It asked AIIMS to counsel the survivor's parents and said the decision has to be of the person concerned. "There are children for adoption. In this country we have lot of sympathies...There are deserted, abandoned children on the streets and even mafias on it. We have to look at them. This is an unwanted pregnancy of a 15-year-old child," it said.

During the proceedings, an AIIMS doctor told the court that it is not child versus foetus but child versus child.

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for AIIMS, mentioned the curative plea and said the termination of pregnancy

is not possible.

"It will be a live baby with severe deformities. Minor mother will have lifelong health issues and cannot reproduce... This child can be given for adoption. It has been 30 weeks now. It is a viable life now," Bhati said.

Bhati also sought the court's permission for counselling with the teen and her parents.

At this juncture, Justice Bagchi said, "Who has stopped you? What is your Parens patriae (parent of the nation) approach? Give respect to your citizen. Show data to the parents and if they choose to keep it. Then so be it.

"But if they think the mental health is in jeopardy then they will take a call. Please do not press your curative. The curative can come from the parents. Let us not make a fight between state and its citizens. Bring in a psychiatrist and counsellor. Let us not choose for people capable for choosing." It is not for AIIMS, the judge said, to choose for citizens and it can only render medical service.

The top court said the decision on termination has to be that of the survivor and her parents. AIIMS, it said, may help them take an informed decision.

"Explain everything to the child and her parents. If after that they want to change views then we will see," the bench said. (PTI)

## Skeleton episode kicks up storm in special session of Odisha Assembly

**BHUBANESWAR, April 30:** A man carrying his sister's skeleton to a bank in Keonjhar caused an uproar during the special session of the Odisha Assembly convened on Thursday to discuss "Participation of Women in Indian Democracy", with Congress MLAs walking out of the chamber briefly in protest.

As soon as the day-long session began, Congress members rushed to the well of the House, holding placards and criticising the BJP-led state government over the incident, even as Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi tried to set the tone of the debate by accusing the opposition of derailing the tweaked women's quota bill and delimitation bill in the Lok Sabha.

Even as Congress MLAs raised slogans over the skeleton episode, House Speaker Surama Pady allowed the proceedings to continue, leading to the opposition party's legislators staging a walkout briefly. Initiating the discussion on the topic of the special session, Chief Minister Majhi targeted the BJP's 24-year rule in Odisha to say.

"The BJP reserving 33 per cent seats for women in the panchayati raj system was not sufficient. They should have made provision to give women adequate representation in the Lok Sabha and in the Assembly too." "BJD made a provision for 33 per cent women's representation at the panchayat level but did not allow it in the Assembly and in the Lok Sabha," he said. Hitting back, Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik referred to the Keonjhar incident to say the "insensitive" state government has "utterly failed the people of Odisha". Terming the tribal man's ordeal "painful", he said, "Odisha's head hangs in shame as a woman's skeleton had to be exhumed by her family and carried to the bank to prove her death in order to claim her rightful dues." (PTI)

## Infosys to set up 20-acre permanent campus in Vizag

**AMARAVATI, April 30:** IT services major Infosys has announced plans to set up a permanent, 20-acre campus in Visakhapatnam, signalling confidence in the region's economic and technological potential.

The facility is designed to accommodate 7,000 professionals.

Over the last two years, Infosys' growth in the city has scaled in the port city from 250 employees to 1,900, with an additional 750 seats set to become operational in the near-term, said an official press release on Thursday.

"The company has outlined plans for a permanent 20-acre campus with a long-term seating capacity of 7,000 professionals - demonstrating strong confidence in the region's long-term potential," said the release.

A defining feature of the IT services company's growth is its deep integration with the local talent ecosystem, it said.

The Visakhapatnam campus has recruited over 1,000 freshers and 500 lateral hires from the region, reflecting the availability of industry-ready talent and the success of Andhra Pradesh's focused skilling and industry-aligned education initiatives. (PTI)

## Whole world impressed by Gujarat's development model: CM on Foundation Day eve

**AHMEDABAD, April 30:** On the eve of Gujarat's 66th Foundation Day, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel on Thursday said the state's development model has drawn global attention.

Extending greetings to people on 'Gujarat Gaurav Diwas', to be celebrated on May 1, he attributed the state's growth to collective efforts and visionary leadership.

"The whole world is impressed by Gujarat's development model and is attracted to Gujarat today," he said, adding the day was an occasion to acknowledge the contributions of great leaders and the people of the state.

He recalled the blessings and guidance of figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Shyamji Krishna Varma, and others, whose inspiration shaped Gujarat's journey.

Referring to the state's formation on May 1, 1960, Patel said doubts were raised about how a region with desert, coastline and hills would progress.

"But everyone can see the clear difference between Gujarat's four decades of development from 1960 to 2000 and the uninterrupted development journey of two and a half decades after 2001," he said while crediting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for laying the foundation of "development politics" in the state.

Gujarat has emerged as a role model for the country under Modi's leadership, he said.

"People have continued to repose faith in Modi's leadership. Gujarat has made major strides in electricity, water, roads, health, education and social sectors. Through 'Jyotigram Yojana', 24-hour continuous three-phase elec-

tricity is being provided to villages," he said.

Power generation capacity has risen from 8,750 MW to around 53,000 MW, with Gujarat being the only state with an integrated gas grid, water grid and electricity grid, the CM said.

Initiatives such as the Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors Summit, launched in 2003 when Modi was CM, have helped position the state as a "global gateway to the future" and contributed to low unemployment, while district-level strengths are being promoted through regional conferences aimed at taking local products to global markets, he added.

"Gujarat is also focusing on renewable energy and green growth, including solar, wind and green hydrogen. Our renewable energy capacity has become 15 per cent of the country's total capacity. More



than three lakh houses have been covered under rooftop solar schemes," Patel pointed out.

Asserting that the state was moving beyond traditional industries by promoting high-tech sec-

tors, he said two semiconductor plants have become operational and two more are to be built.

Sanand and Dholera are going to become hubs of the semiconductor industry, while an AI Centre of Excellence has been set up at GIFT City, the CM said. On urban and regional development, he said the government has increased the urban development budget by 40 per cent and prepared economic master plans for six regions with support from NITI Aayog.

Gujarat has drawn up a roadmap for becoming a developed state by 2047 with the vision of 'Earning Well, Living Well', the CM said.

He stressed on environment-friendly growth and referred to initiatives such as 'Catch the Rain' and tree plantation drives under 'Ek Ped Maan Ke Naam'.

The chief minister also highlighted plans to boost sports infra-

structure as Gujarat prepares to host the Commonwealth Games, saying the state aims to emerge as a sports hub.

Referring to India's target of becoming a developed nation by 2047, Patel said, "Gujarat would play a key role during the 'Amrit Kaal' and aims to become a model state by 2035 when it marks 75 years of its formation. We have only one resolve, to provide the poor, farmers, youth, women and the deprived sections with the benefits of welfare schemes and bring them into the mainstream of development."

Calling for collective efforts, Patel urged people to dedicate themselves to building a developed Gujarat that contributes to a developed India by 2047. "On Gujarat Gaurav Diwas, let us all resolve to dedicate ourselves to a developed Gujarat," Patel said. (PTI)

# Baazing Khwatai: A chilling blend of folklore, Faith and Fear

The Assamese feature film BAAZINGG KHWATAI is set to deliver a unique and terrifying cinematic experience by blending folklore, psychological tension, and ritualistic horror. The film is set against the mysterious and remote landscapes of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, where ancient beliefs and primal fears continue to thrive even today.

The story begins with the shocking discovery of severed human heads in a seemingly peaceful town. What initially appears to be a gruesome crime soon takes a darker turn when officer Tribhuvan begins investigating the case. The probe quickly moves beyond the realm of ordinary crime and plunges into the depths of age-old belief systems.

During the investigation, it is revealed that a secretive cult has been performing hidden rituals for generations to appease the deity 'Baazing Khwatai' due to an ancestral compulsion.

As the truth unfolds, the film transcends a mere crime thriller and explores the conflict between inherited faith, deep-rooted fear, and forgotten folk legends. At its core, BAAZINGG KHWATAI examines how the stories we inherit and the gods we create can sometimes become burdens rather than sources of comfort. The film raises a powerful question: When does faith cross the line from devotion and become an overwhelming burden?

The film is directed by Siddharth Shasta, Professor and Head of Screen Acting at FTII Pune. This project is also an attempt to democratize filmmaking by bring-

ing together both experienced and emerging talent associated with FTII.

Director Siddharth Shasta says, "This film shows how inherited beliefs shape our behaviour, often without us knowing where they originated or why they continue."

Veteran actor Siddharth Sharma, with 26 years of experience, plays the lead role. Navkishor Dutta is making his Bollywood feature debut with this film. Anshul Tyagi is playing the character of 'Nakota', while Alvin, who gained fame from the viral video 'Sajni Shinde Ka Viral Video', is essaying the role of 'Mahendra'.

Anshul Tyagi commented, "This film has come from a very honest place. We have treated it as a collaborative and learning process. It draws inspiration from folk tales heard in different parts of India. While the film does evoke fear and tension, it is not meant to spread unnecessary terror. Instead, it aims to provide a deeper understanding of faith, culture, feminine energy, and divinity."

The majority of the film has been shot in Assam, with some portions filmed in Arunachal Pradesh. The raw and mysterious terrain of the region has been made an integral part of the story.

The premiere of BAAZINGG KHWATAI is scheduled for 7th May 2026 at PVR City Centre in Guwahati, while the pan-India theatrical release will take place on 8th May

2026. The film will release on 74 screens across Assam and will also have selected shows in Arunachal Pradesh. (This was stated in a Press Release)



The entire film has been shot in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh

## TESSA THOMPSON, OWEN COOPER AND EBON MOSS-BACHRACH TO STAR IN THRILLER 'FOXFINDER' FROM 'SEVERANCE' DIRECTOR AOIFE MCARDLE



BAFTA and Emmy award-nominee Tessa Thompson ("Thor: Ragnarok," "Hedda"), Golden Globe and Emmy award-winner Owen Cooper ("Adolescence," "Wuthering Heights") and two-time Emmy award-winner Ebon Moss-Bachrach ("The Bear, The Fantastic Four: First Steps") are attached to star in upcoming psychological thriller "Foxfinder."

The film, from DGA and Emmy award-nominated director Aoife McArdle ("Severance," "Kissing Candice") and exploring the "absurdity of state control and societal conformity," is launching in Cannes with Cornerstone and Logical Pictures Group co-repping international sales and distribution. WME Independent, Cornerstone and Logical Pictures Group are jointly representing the U.S. rights.

"Foxfinder" is based on the award-winning play by Dawn King, with a screenplay co-written by director McArdle and King. The play won the 2011 Papatango New Writing Prize. Production is set to begin in Germany, with filming taking place in Bavaria in summer 2026.

The film follows Jude and Sam, a grieving couple clinging to routine and survival, whose lives are upended when William, a coldly devout government "foxfinder," arrives at their struggling farm with a mission to root out the designated enemy — the fox. As paranoia festers and absurd regulations tighten their grip, suspicion replaces love, and truth itself begins to warp.

The film is a Rabbit Track Pictures and Elation Pictures production developed with Film4 and the BFI (awarding National Lottery funding), co-produced by Komplizen Film and Tri-mafilm. In addition to support from Film4 and the BFI, financiers include Logical Pictures Group, German Federal Film Fund (DFFF), the Bavarian fund FFF Bayern and Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg. It is produced by BAFTA award nominee Kamilla Hodol and BAFTA award winner Emilie Jouffroy for Elation Pictures, and Rabbit Track Pictures' Kitty Kaletsky, two-time Academy award winner Janine Jackowski and David Armati Lechner from Tri-mafilm. Executive producers are Farhana Bhula and Cate Kane for Film4 and Fred Fiore and Ryan Wickers for Logical.

Tessa Thompson is represented by CAA, Untitled Entertainment and JTWAMM. Ebon Moss-Bachrach is represented by WME, Sue Leibman at Barking Dog Entertainment, and Peikoff Mahan Law Offices. Owen Cooper is represented by Independent Talent Group; Sloane, Offer, Weber & Dern; Public Eye Communications. McArdle is represented by Josh Varney at 42 and WME and Dawn King by Berlin Associates. (Agencies)



## Kapil Sharma announces World Laughter Day special

Netflix will mark World Laughter Day with a special episode of "The Great Indian Kapil Show", featuring host Kapil Sharma alongside popular influencers Samay Raina and Ranveer Allahbadia. The episode, streaming May 2, will also feature regulars Sunil Grover, Krushna Abhishek and Kiku Sharda in their signature roles during a segment called the "TGIKS News Debate".

Sharma said the special episode was planned keeping the audience's love for the show in mind.

"Humare show ko audience se jo pyaar mila hai, usse yahi motivation milta hai ki unhe fresh aur entertaining content diya jaye. World Laughter Day ke mauke par Netflix ke saath ek special episode plan kiya hai -- natural, fun aur full of laughter (The love we have received from the audience for our show motivates us to keep giving them fresh and entertaining content. On the occasion of World Laughter Day, we have planned a special episode with Netflix - natural, fun and full of laughter)," he said. (PTI)

## SUNJAY KAPUR'S ASSETS TO BE PRESERVED ON PLEA BY KARISMA KAPOORS' CHILDREN: HC

The Delhi High Court on Thursday directed preservation of the assets of late Sunjay Kapur, ruling that all "suspicious circumstances" raised by the industrialist's children from his marriage with actor Karisma Kapoor have to be completely removed by his third wife, Priya Kapur, before the acceptance of his purported last will.

Justice Jyoti Singh passed the interim order on an application filed by Karisma Kapoor's children to restrain Priya Kapur from alienating their father's assets, reportedly worth ₹ 30,000 crore.

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Justice Jyoti Singh passed the interim order on an application filed by Karisma Kapoor's children to restrain Priya Kapur from alienating their father's assets, reportedly worth ₹ 30,000 crore.

The interim application was filed in a suit by the children, challenging their late father's purported will of his assets.

"Having heard and on examination of the material on record, I have considered view that all legitimate suspicious circumstances raised by the plaintiffs will have to be completely removed by defendant number one (Priya Kapur) before the document is accepted as the last will," the judge said.

"Plaintiffs have made out a prima-facie case that the assets which are subject matter need to be protected, preserved, pending disposal of the suit," she added.

Justice Singh ordered that the equity shareholdings in the three Indian companies of the deceased cannot be changed and also re-



strained the disposal of his personal effects, including artwork.

The court said if the assets are not preserved and Priya Kapur ultimately fails to prove the validity and genuineness of the will, the deceased's children from his marriage with Karisma Kapoor -- his second wife -- and his mother Rani Kapoor would be deprived of their legitimate shares.

"I have restrained from alienating, transferring, pledging, liquidating or in any other manner changing the equity shareholdings in the three Indian companies. I have restrained from withdrawing the PF amount. I have restrained from withdrawing monies from the three accounts except to the extent of discharging liabilities towards the children," the judge said.

The court clarified that it has not passed the order with respect to immovable foreign assets.

A detailed copy of the verdict is awaited.

Sunjay Kapur died on June 12, 2025, after collapsing during a polo match in England. He had reportedly suffered a sudden cardiac arrest. (PTI)

## 'I should have been Langda Tyagi in Omkara': Irrfan once told Vishal Bhardwaj



Vishal Bhardwaj has revealed that his friend Irrfan Khan was sceptical about his decision to cast Saif Ali Khan as Langda Tyagi in Omkara and believed he himself was a better fit for the character.

The director recounted what Irrfan said to him after learning that Saif had been roped in to play Langda Tyagi in the 2006 film, adapted from William Shakespeare's tragedy Othello.

"For the role of Langda Tyagi, you have Saif play the part, and it will be a huge deal if he even agrees to cut his hair. I should be doing this part." But by then, Saif was locked, and the shoot had already happened. I think if Irrfan had done it, it would have been something else entirely," Bhardwaj said.

He was speaking at a session on Wednesday evening following the

special screening of A Story That Refused to Die, a documentary on Irrfan's film Paan Singh Tomar.

Though Irrfan did not feature in Omkara, the second instalment of Bhardwaj's acclaimed Shakespearean trilogy, he headlined the first film, Maqbool, and played a pivotal part in the third, Haider.

Maqbool, an adaptation of Macbeth set in the Mumbai underworld, featured Irrfan in the titular role. Haider, based on Hamlet and set in Kashmir, saw him portray the mysterious character Roohdaar.

Bhardwaj said Irrfan initially declined the relatively small role in Haider.

"I told him to read it as it is about Kashmir and is a film about politics. Irrfan was a very politically aware person and later said, 'This film should be made and I will do this part,'" he recalled.

According to Bhardwaj, both he

and Irrfan had their fair share of disagreements.

At one point, the filmmaker did not speak to the actor for over two years following a misunderstanding over Ishqiya, which Bhardwaj had produced.

The black comedy, directed by Abhishek Chaubey, starred Vidya Balan, Naseeruddin Shah, and Arshad Warsi, and garnered wide acclaim upon its release.

"Irrfan wanted to do Ishqiya, but No Smoking (produced by me) had failed, and when we went to him for dates, he said, 'I thought you would not produce any more films after No Smoking failed, so I gave the dates to someone else.' I was like, 'Irrfan, this is not how things work. If a film fails, will I stop making films?' The film was to be made by Abhishek Chaubey, and many things happened during that time. I was very upset with Irrfan

and did not speak to him for two years," he recounted.

The ice finally broke during 7 Khoon Maaf, when Bhardwaj approached Irrfan, and he immediately agreed to be part of it. In the film, the actor played the third husband of the protagonist, Susanna Anna-Marie Johannes, portrayed by Priyanka Chopra Jonas.

"For the role, I could not think of anyone but Irrfan. When I called him, he said, 'I was waiting for your call for a very long time. I do not want to hear the role. I trust you, so I will do anything you give me.' He was such a lovely soul," the filmmaker said.

Bhardwaj also spoke about several films that never materialised, including an adaptation of Tirichh, based on a story by Uday Prakash, and a romantic film titled Dream Sequence, in which Irrfan was to play a singer. (PTI)

# Barcelona can clinch La Liga title with a win and another stumble by Real Madrid



**BARCELONA, April 30:** Barcelona could clinch a second straight La Liga title this weekend if it maintains its winning form and Real Madrid endures another stumble.

Barcelona leads Madrid by 11 points with five games left. If Barcelona wins at Osasuna on Saturday, then Madrid must also win at Espanyol on Sunday to prolong the title race for at least one more round.

If everything goes Barcelona's way this weekend then it will host Real Madrid in a clásico in the following game as the newly crowned champion.

While Hansi Flick is on the cusp of a third major title (including the 2025 Copa del Rey) in his two years in charge of Barcelona, Madrid is facing a second straight season without a major piece of silverware.

**Key matches**  
Barcelona is running away with the domestic title. It has won nine straight in La Liga, a domestic winning run marred only by a loss to Atletico Madrid in the Champions League quarterfinals.

Barcelona can't expect an easy victory in Pamplona, however.

Ninth-placed Osasuna has lost only twice at its El Sadar Stadium this season and is on a run of 10 straight home matches without defeat.

Madrid, meanwhile, has only one win its last six games across all competitions as it limps to the finish of a disappointing season in which Xabi Alonso was fired and — barring a drastic change of events — Alvaro Arbeloa will also be ousted in the offseason.

Espanyol has been in an even bigger rut than Madrid.

Espanyol was in fifth place at the start of 2026 but it has yet to win this year — an astonishing run of 16 games — and fallen into the large group of teams trying to avoid relegation.

Atletico Madrid plays at Valencia on Saturday before Diego Simeone's team visits Arsenal which visits Brentford on Saturday, and five points behind Nottingham Forest, which visits Chelsea on Monday.

**Players to watch**  
Barcelona 22-year-old midfielder Fermin

López, who is expected to play for Spain at this summer's World Cup, is finishing the campaign as one of its most incisive attacking players. His goal in the 2-0 win at Getafe last Saturday was No. 13 for Fermin this season to go with 16 assists.

While Madrid struggles, Vinicius Júnior is keeping up his good form with two goals in his last two league games.

**Out of action**  
Lamine Yamal is out for the season for Barcelona with a muscle injury. Raphinha's return from injury is unknown after he was back to practicing with the team this week. Both Barcelona stars are expected to be fit for the World Cup.

Madrid will be missing regular starters Kylian Mbappé, Éder Militão and Arda Güler at Espanyol. Mbappé has a left hamstring issue and the France striker will rest with the World Cup starting in June.

Militão has been ruled out of the World Cup for Brazil after he underwent surgery to fix a hamstring injury this week. (AP)

## Wrexham aims to keep alive Premier League dream by securing playoff spot in C'ship finale

**LONDON, April 30:** For Wrexham's growing global fanbase, it's set to be another heart-stopping end to the season.

This time, a place in the Premier League is at stake.

"I think a defibrillator is the traditional fifth season gift? Would make sense for this show," Ryan Reynolds, the Hollywood celebrity who is a co-owner of the club, wrote on X in a nod to the "Welcome to Wrexham" series that has documented the team's unprecedented journey up English soccer's league pyramid.

The final step is the biggest one, though.

On Saturday, Wrexham heads into the final round of regular-season games in the second-tier Championship aiming to secure a place in the playoffs that will determine the last promotion spot to the Premier League.

The top two teams go up automatically — one of them is sure to be Coventry, which will finish first — and the teams finishing third to sixth will advance to the playoffs. With one match left, Wrexham is in sixth place.

That last playoff spot is a three-way contest between Wrexham, Hull (in seventh place, behind Wrexham on goal difference) and Derby (in eighth place, one point



further back).  
Wrexham has the toughest game — at home to fourth-place Middlesbrough, which needs to win to stand a chance of finishing in second spot.

Hull hosts ninth-place Norwich and Derby is at home to 15th-place Sheffield United.

Wrexham is already assured of the highest finish in its 162-year history — its previous best was

15th in the second tier in the 1978-79 season — but still possible is a fourth straight promotion that would be beyond the owners' wildest dreams.

Three promotions in a row had never been done before in English soccer. So Wrexham, a club on so many people's lips owing to its remarkable rise since being bought by Reynolds and Rob Mac (formerly McElhenney) in 2021, is

well ahead of schedule.

"At the start of the season," Wrexham midfielder Ollie Rathbone said, "everyone would have taken this scenario."

All 12 of the matches in the Championship's last round kick off at the same time.

**Key matchups**  
It's also a huge, if not decisive, round in the Premier League for both the title race and battle to

avoid relegation.

Arsenal — seeking to be English champion for the first time since 2004 — leads by three points from second-place Manchester City, which has a game in hand. Arsenal hosts Fulham on Saturday and City visits Everton on Monday night.

At the other end of the standings, third-from-last Tottenham — a top-flight team since 1978 — is in the relegation zone with four games left. Its next match is at Aston Villa on Sunday. Tottenham is two points behind West Ham, which visits Brentford on Saturday, and five points behind Nottingham Forest, which visits Chelsea on Monday.

Also notable is Manchester United's home game against rival Liverpool on Sunday. They are in third and fourth place, respectively, and both are bidding to tie up Champions League qualification.

**Out of action**  
It remains to be seen how long Liverpool winger Mohamed Salah, who is leaving the club at the end of the season after nine years, will be sidelined after sustaining a hamstring injury last weekend.

Man City will be hoping Rodri is available to return from a muscle injury after missing the team's last two games. (AP)

## Luis Enrique weighs PSG rotation in Ligue 1 before Bayern return as Hakimi ruled out



**PARIS, April 30:** Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique faces a difficult strategic dilemma.

As he pursues back-to-back Champions League trophies, Luis Enrique must ensure he's also still fielding competitive teams in the closing stages of Ligue 1.

Brilliant on the European stage, PSG has been less dominant domestically and holds a six-point lead over second-placed Lens.

Both sides have four games left and Luis Enrique's team has to travel to Lens on May 13, postponed from April 11 due to PSG's involvement in the Champions League.

The reigning French champion hosts mid-table Lorient at the Parc des Princes on Saturday followed by next week's trip to Bayern, where it will defend a one-goal advantage after a thrilling 5-4 win over the Bundesliga champion midweek.

PSG's squad depth gives Luis Enrique plenty of options, but heavy rotation this month backfired in a 2-1 home defeat to Lyon as substitutes Illia Zabarnyi, Gonçalo Ramos and Lucas Berardo underperformed.

**Key matchups**  
Lens came back from two goals down but dropped important points in a 3-3 draw at Brest last week. The northern side has no room for mistakes when it travels south to Nice on Saturday.

Behind PSG and Lens, the fight for the Champions League places is intense.

Seven-time champion Lyon and fourth-placed Lille are level on points with the top three gaining direct entry to the Champions League, and the side in fourth entering qualifying. Lyon hosts in-form Rennes on Sunday while Lille takes on Le Havre.

Lagging four points behind Lyon, sixth-placed Marseille still

hopes to secure Champions League football and travels to struggling Nantes on Saturday.

**Players to watch**  
Elye Wahi: The 23-year-old Wahi is finding the form that once made him among Europe's most promising young strikers. Back in Ligue 1 with Nice on loan from Eintracht Frankfurt, Wahi has been scoring decisive goals for Nice, including last week's penalty that secured a 1-1 draw at his former club Marseille.

Sebastian Nanasi: The Swedish attacking midfielder grabbed the spotlight in Malmö before landing in Strasbourg during the 2024 summer. Looking to secure a spot at the World Cup, Nanasi has been in top form in the Conference League with decisive goals and assists.

**Out of action**  
PSG will be without defender Achraf Hakimi, who will also miss the return leg of the Champions League semifinal against Bayern because of a right thigh injury. He will be out of action for several weeks. PSG second-choice goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier has also been ruled out for weeks after injuring his right thigh during training while forward Gonçalo Ramos is suspended for the match against Lorient.

**Off the pitch**  
Toulouse coach Carles Martínez Novell is leaving at the end of the season. Toulouse announced the decision on Wednesday with the team sitting 10th in the standings. The Spanish coach arrived at Toulouse initially as an assistant coach, winning the French Cup in 2023, and was appointed permanent coach the following season. Martínez Novell led Toulouse to one of its greatest wins when the southern side upset Liverpool 3-2 in a Europa League game in November 2023. (AP)

## Still battling demons, but numbness helped me win: Sourav Kothari on father's void

**KOLKATA, April 30:** Sourav Kothari says he is still "battling a lot of demons" after the loss of his father, but a strange "numbness" also helped him cope with pressure en route to back-to-back World titles.

Kothari defeated Indian ace Pankaj Advani 1133-477 to win the IBSF World Billiards Championship (time-format) in Carlow, Ireland on Tuesday, producing a dominant performance that included a 485 break lasting one hour and five minutes of uninterrupted play, followed by runs of 121, 90, 241 and an unfinished 155.

The 41-year-old's triumph came less than four months after the death of his father and mentor Manoj Kothari.

"Wins and losses don't matter to me because something so big has happened in my life that everything else has diminished in value," Kothari told reporters in a virtual interaction facilitated by SAI.

"When you don't give too much importance, it doesn't cause pressure. Our game is about how you handle pressure and because I am so numb, I feel I dealt with it much better."

"There is no expectation out of me... I don't have any expectation out of myself, and that probably helped me win this world title."

Describing the feeling bittersweet, he said: "It's sweet because obviously winning a world title is in itself, I think, a great feat, let alone defending it, and bitter obviously because I wish that my father was here to see me achieve this feat again. I mean I have to accept the reality and move ahead with times."

Opening up on his bond with his father, Kothari said the void remains overwhelming.

"I still am battling a lot of my demons in the head... in my case every step of the way was connected with my father. Somehow I see him everywhere and I still feel that he is around me... maybe just around me."

Kothari also recalled how he was persuaded to play the National Championship soon after his father's passing.

"I was sitting in my room in Kolkata... I had locked myself and I was weeping, and I got a call from the BSFI secretary (Sunil Bajaj) saying, 'I'm calling you as a brother... please come and play.' My mom egged me on and I went and played... and won the National title."

**Calls for cue sport in CWG 2030**  
The multiple-time world champion also pushed for cue sports' inclusion in the centenary edition of the Commonwealth Games slated in Ahmedabad in 2030.

"Billiards and snooker have a fantastic chance of winning multiple medals... we've won multiple golds at the Asian Games. It will be great for India's medal tally if we are included in the Commonwealth Games."  
"We need a push from SAI, the ministry and the media... This sport deserves its place in multi-continental events with such a rich history of world and Asian champions."

**Lacking in infra**  
He stressed the need for stronger grassroots infrastructure to tap growing interest.

"We are still lacking in terms of infrastructure... people should be able to come and try the sport at a subsidised cost. Once that happens, the whole system can change... we can go back to a place where lakhs of tables are active across the country."

Looking ahead, Kothari will feature in a snooker event in Mumbai from May 5, but the next big competition will be the World Snooker Championship likely to be held in Indore later this year. (PTI)



## Indian boxing squad to compete at Asian U15 & U17 C'ships

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** A 56-member Indian boxing contingent is all set to begin its campaign at the Asian Boxing U15 & U17 Championships 2026, which gets underway on Friday in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

India heads into the prestigious age-group tournament with a strong and well-rounded squad across both boys' and girls' categories.

The Indian U-17 teams will feature 13 boxers each in the boys' and girls' categories, competing across weight divisions ranging from 44kg-46kg to +80kg, supported by four coaches and a physiotherapist per squad.

Meanwhile, the U-15 teams feature 15 boxers each in both boys' and girls' divisions, competing across 30-33kg to +70kg categories, with five coaches and a physiotherapist accompanying each side.

The championships serve as a crucial platform for identifying and developing the next generation of elite boxers, with many of these young athletes expected to progress through the national pathway and represent India at major international competitions in the years to come. (PTI)

## Spirited Indian men fight back to pip Slovakia

**LONDON, April 30:** Indian men staged a spirited comeback to edge past Slovakia 3-2 in a gripping Group 7 tie at the ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships here.

With the win, India climbed to the top of the group standings and strengthened their position ahead of their next tie against Guatemala.

The contest ebbed and flowed before India sealed victory through resilience and composure under pressure.

Slovakia drew first blood as Lubomir Pistej, ranked 149, used his experience to outmanoeuvre Manush Shah, ranked No. 51, in a five-game opener 11-8 5-11 8-11 11-5 11-6, handing his side an early lead.

India responded immediately through their highest-ranked paddler at 42, Manav Thakkar, who produced a composed and controlled display to defeat Jakub Zelinka in straight games 11-6 11-8 11-6, leveling the tie at 1-1.

However, Slovakia regained the upper hand in the third rubber, as defensive player Wang Yang delivered a clinical performance to overcome Harmeet Desai 16-14 11-5 11-9.

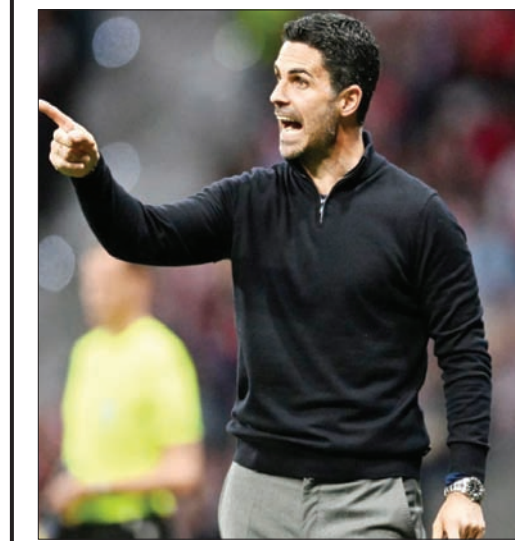
Mixing sharp variations in pace with precise counter-attacking, Wang disrupted Harmeet's rhythm and pushed Slovakia within touching distance of victory.

With their backs against the wall at 1-2, India mounted a decisive comeback. Manav once again rose to the occasion, emphatically overpowering Lubomir 11-3 11-3 11-3 to restore parity.

The momentum firmly with India, left-hander Manush delivered under pressure in the deciding rubber, defeating Jakub 11-8 11-8 11-7 to seal a crucial 3-2 win.

The men's and women's teams will play their final group matches, scheduled later on Thursday. (PTI)

## Arsenal manager Arteta infuriated by decision to overturn penalty against Atletico Madrid



**MADRID, April 30:** Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta called it "unacceptable" and said it was a moment that changed the course of his team's Champions League semifinal against Atletico Madrid.

Meanwhile, Atletico coach Diego Simeone's antics while referee Danny Makkelie studied the sideline monitor at the Metropolitan stadium came under scrutiny Wednesday.

In a white-hot atmosphere and the score locked at 1-1 in Madrid, the Dutch official opted to overturn a second-half penalty awarded to Arsenal when substitute Eberechi Eze went down under a challenge from David Hancko.

"The whole sequence tells the story. I mean it's a clear contact," Arteta told TNT Sports. "At this level it's completely unacceptable."

The game ended 1-1 with the second

leg taking place at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium next week.

Arteta said Makkelie had reviewed the penalty incident 13 times before deciding to overturn his decision. Soccer's rules state decisions should not be changed unless there is a "clear and obvious error."

"You make that decision, you cannot overturn that decision when you have to look at it 13 times," Arteta added.

UEFA said the penalty was ruled out because no foul had been committed, despite replays showing clear contact between Hancko and Eze.

TNT Sports panelists Steven Gerrard, Martin Keown and Steve McManaman also disagreed with Makkelie's decision to overturn the penalty. But they also pointed to Simeone's reaction on the sideline while the official reviewed the

video.  
"As the referee's coming over, before he's even looked at the screen, Simeone's in his face, he's waving his arms," said Gerrard, the Liverpool great.

"Then he's in his ear when he's at the screen. It's a performance and he's the best at doing it."

McManaman, who played for Atletico city rival Real Madrid, said of Simeone: "His performance was terrible and that's why people don't like the dark arts, don't like Atletico Madrid."

Earlier in the game, Simeone and Atletico players complained about the penalty call that went against their team late in the first half. Viktor Gyökeres put Arsenal ahead by converting a 44th-minute penalty kick. Julián Alvarez equalized for Atletico — also from the penalty spot — in the 56th. (AP)

# Starc boost for DC against high flying Rajasthan Royals

**JAIPUR, April 30:** Delhi Capitals have little time to dwell on what has been a bruising stretch of results as they gear up to face a confident Rajasthan Royals in their Indian Premier League match here on Friday.

It has been a difficult run for the Axar Patel-led side this month. They have swung between extremes in the last two games. From posting a 250-plus total only to concede a world-record chase, to being bowled out for 75 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Add to that a one-run defeat against Gujarat Titans earlier this month, and Delhi have had their share of emotionally damaging results. With three wins and four losses, they are seventh on the table and need a turnaround soon.

Delhi's biggest concern has been their inconsistent batting. While the likes of KL Rahul, David Miller, Tristan Stubbs and Sameer Rizvi have all contributed in patches, the unit has failed to click collectively.

In the last match, Abhishek Porel's knock as an Impact Player was one of the few positives, helping the team avoid a record-low total and the team management will be tempted to give him a go in the playing XI.

There is some good news on the bowling front. Pace ace Mitchell Starc is set to return



after getting clearance from Cricket Australia to play from May 1. With Lungi Ngidi still unavailable, Starc's inclusion comes as a timely boost. He is likely to replace either Kyle Jamieson or Dushantha Chameera.

Delhi's bowlers couldn't do much while defending 75 in the previous game, but they will need to be sharper against a strong Rajasthan batting line-up.

Their top order has been aggressive, with fearless Vaibhav Sooryavanshi taking on world class bowlers like Jasprit Bumrah,

Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins from the outset and Yashvi Jaiswal showing good touch.

The fourth-placed Royals, in contrast, come into this match with confidence. They recently handed Punjab Kings their first defeat of the season, which was their sixth win in nine games.

Another positive for Rajasthan is the middle order finding form after a slow start. That gives them more balance and makes them harder to contain across the innings.

Against a Delhi attack that has been under pressure, Rajasthan will back themselves to continue their momentum.

For Delhi, the focus is clear. The batters need to put together a complete performance instead of relying on individual efforts. The bowlers, with Starc back, must find ways to control the scoring, especially against an attacking top order.

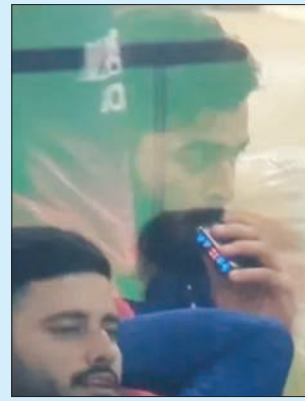
#### Squads:

**Rajasthan Royals:** Shubham Dubey, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Riyan Parag (c), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Donovan Ferreira, Ravindra Jadeja, Jofra Archer, Narendra Burger, Tushar Deshpande, Kwna Maphaka, Sandeep Sharma, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Ravi Bishnoi, Aman Rao Perala, Adam Milne, Kuldeep Sen, Dasun Shanaka, Sushant Mishra, Vignesh Puthur, Ravi Singh, Brijesh Sharma.

**Delhi Capitals:** Axar Patel (c), K.L. Rahul, Karun Nair, David Miller, Pathum Nissanka, Sahil Parakh, Prithvi Shaw, Abhishek Porel, Tristan Stubbs, Sameer Rizvi, Ashutosh Sharma, Vipraj Nigam, Ajay Mandal, Tripurana Vijay, Madhav Tiwari, Auqib Dar, Nitish Rana, T. Natarajan, Mukesh Kumar, Dushantha Chameera, Lungisani Ngidi, Kyle Jamieson, Kuldeep Yadav, Mitchell Starc.

Match starts 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

## 'Mothers Against Vaping' seeks probe into Riyan Parag 'vaping' visuals during IPL match



**NEW DELHI, April 30:** A women's group on Thursday demanded an inquiry into visuals purportedly showing cricketer Riyan Parag using a vape-like device during an IPL match, and questioned whether the incident was part of an attempt to normalise banned products.

Mothers Against Vaping, a collective of mothers advocating against the promotion of new-age nicotine devices such as vapes and e-cigarettes, has sought a thorough investigation into the incident.

The incident took place on April 28 during a match between Rajasthan Royals and Punjab Kings. The video, captured during a live broadcast, appeared to show the 24-year-old vaping inside the dressing room.

While the BCCI officials have sought an explanation from the team's captain, the group expressed its concerns over no formal notice issued against the player so far.

Citing provisions of the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2019, the group said electronic cigarettes are banned in India, including their production, manufacture, import, export, transport, sale, distribution, storage and advertisement.

It also rejected claims in some reports that vaping indoors falls in a "grey zone", calling such assertions "misinformation".

"Union Health Ministry has also clarified that possession of e-cigarettes in any form or quantity is a violation of the law. The law clearly specifies that violation can attract imprisonment of up to six months or a fine of up to ₹ 50,000, or both, while contravention of the wider prohibition can attract imprisonment of up to one year or a fine of up to ₹ 1 lakh, or both, with higher punishment for repeat offences."

the group said in its statement.

"In India, the law must stand above all else. Whether one is a celebrity or a common citizen, the same rules must apply," the group's spokesperson said, adding that public figures should not be allowed to make a mockery of a product category that India has already banned in the interest of public health.

The group also referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks at the time of the ban in 2019, when he had cautioned against e-cigarettes being projected as a fashion statement and described them as a "new way of intoxication".

It said the presence of a vape-like device around a high-visibility cricketer on national television could send a wrong message to millions of young viewers.

The group called for an investigation into whether the incident was a "deliberate law-defying act, a reckless mistake, or a calculated attempt at publicity around a banned product".

While appreciating the BCCI for taking cognisance of the issue, the women's group urged the cricket board to adopt a zero-tolerance approach and ensure accountability.

"We are all seeing an unmistakable trend: multinational tobacco companies are desperate to keep vapes in public conversation and to normalise these devices in India despite the ban. In that context, it is legitimate to ask whether Riyan Parag was acting entirely on his own or whether this controversy served, intentionally or otherwise, as publicity for banned substances. We are asking for an investigation," the statement read.

The collective added that if Parag had no ill intent, he should clarify his position and cooperate with any inquiry. "He should voluntarily submit to due process. No celebrity can claim a different standard from the one applied to ordinary citizens," it said.

The group further said that Indian cricket cannot afford to conduct that "normalises a banned product before young viewers". "The board must establish facts, enforce accountability, and send an unmistakable message that the law and the health of India's children come first," it said. (PTI)

## Dhawan's Da One Sports launches High Performance Centre in Gwalior

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** Shikhar Dhawan's 'Da One Sports' launched its first-ever High Performance Centre (HPC) at the Aditya World Cricket Academy in partnership with the Madhya Pradesh League and Bundelkhand Bulls in Gwalior on Thursday.

The 'Da One HPC' is conceived as the first of many such centres across India. By combining world-class infrastructure with a long-term development approach, the initiative is designed to reshape how young athletes are identified, trained, and prepared for the highest levels of the sport.

The 'Da One HPC' in Gwalior will be led by former India cricketer and national selector Saba Karim as Technical Director, with mentorship from Madan Sharma, childhood coach of Dhawan.

"Cricket has given me so much, so its my duty to give back to the game and to the youngsters of this country," Dhawan told PTI. "Our first HPC is coming up in Gwalior. We have hired quality coaches who will implement the thought process of me and my team," he said.

"We have tied up with Aditya World Academy and Bundelkhand Bulls...the kids who do well will play for Bundelkhand Bulls. The idea is to expand and have centres at other Indian cities while maintaining quality. I am a process driven person and what I want is the core process to remain strong," Dhawan added.

Mahanaarayanan Scindia, President, MPCCA, said, "Investing in grassroots cricket ensures a strong pipeline of talent, making India's cricket ecosystem sustainable, competitive, and globally dominant in the years ahead." (PTI)

## This season, we don't have much options: MI skipper Hardik Pandya

**MUMBAI, April 30:** Skipper Hardik Pandya admitted that his bowling resources are stretched but stressed the need to find solutions under pressure, conceding that Mumbai Indians are falling short of their own high standards this season after a six-wicket loss to Sunrisers Hyderabad in an IPL match on Wednesday.

Despite piling up a mammoth 243 for 5, Mumbai Indians still ended up on the losing side as Sunrisers Hyderabad chased down the target with eight deliveries to spare, even as their ace pacer Jasprit Bumrah endured an off day, conceding 54 runs in his four overs and going wicketless.

The loss left Mumbai Indians languishing on four points from eight games, while Sunrisers Hyderabad climbed to third spot with 12 points from nine matches.

"I think this season we don't have much option, we really need to see what all differences we can do. I won't put my bowlers under the bus. I think as an overall unit, we have not been able to do what exactly Mumbai Indians stands for," said Pandya when asked how he plans to address his bowling attack after the bowlers failed to defend a strong total. (PTI)

## Thomas Cup Finals: India take on Chinese Taipei in quarters, look to stay on course for title

**HORSENS (DENMARK), April 30:** India will aim to stay on course for a second time when they face a formidable Chinese Taipei in the quarterfinals of the Thomas Cup Finals here on Friday.

Four years ago, India achieved an unprecedented feat by clinching the Thomas Cup crown -- the world team championship of badminton -- bringing the sport firmly into focus among the country's youth.

This time, India progressed to the quarterfinals after finishing second in Group A and will face Chinese Taipei, who are yet to win the title.

India made a strong start to their campaign with a 4-1 win over Canada, followed by a 5-0 sweep of Australia, before going down 2-3 to China despite a spirited effort.

Chinese Taipei, who topped Group C, is also a formidable side, led by world No. 6 Chou Tien Chen. Alongside him, world No. 8 and reigning All England champion Lin Chun-Yi and world No. 21 Chi Yu Jen add depth to their



singles line-up.

Chun-Yi, currently one of the most attacking players, had defeated Lakshya in last month's All England Championships summit clash. They also have Chia Hao Lee, the 2025 All England runner-up, in their ranks.

In doubles, the Taiwanese side boasts of the world No. 14 pair of Chiu Hsiang Chieh and Wang Chin-Lin, and world No. 16 duo of Lee Jhe-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan. In

two matches, Liu Kuang Heng has paired up with Yang Po Han when they faced Denmark and Sweden.

India, on the other hand, have looked in good touch, with both singles and doubles combinations performing well.

Young Ayush Shetty has carried forward his form from the Badminton Asia Championships, where he finished runner-up, winning all three of his matches, including victories over Brian Yang

and Weng Hong Yang in the second singles.

Old warhorses HS Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth have shared the third singles responsibilities, with the latter producing a fine comeback behind win over China's Lu Guang Zu on Wednesday.

Prannoy had played a similar role during India's title-winning campaign in 2022.

All England finalist Lakshya Sen, though lost two three-game thrillers, has impressed with his performances.

The doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty won their opening two matches before narrowly losing to China's Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang. It was their first tournament after Satwik's return from a shoulder injury, and the close contest is expected to help them ahead of the knockout stage.

The second doubles pair of Haribaran Amsakarun and MR Arjun have also won two of their three matches so far and will be keen to help India reach the semifinals. (PTI)

## Parag fined 25 percent of match fees for vaping incident, BCCI exploring 'stringent action' on RR

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** Rajasthan Royals captain Riyan Parag was on Thursday fined 25 per cent of his match fee for bringing the game into "disrepute" after being caught vaping on camera during the IPL game against Punjab Kings in Mullanpur. Parag's actions drew condemnation on social media.

PTI has learned that on field umpires Tanmay Srivastava and Nitin Menon had not reported the matter to match referee Amit Sharma right after the game. They only did that after seeing visual proof and Sharma found Parag guilty for a code of conduct breach as per the IPL guidelines.

The Level 1 offence carries 25 per cent deduction from match fees and one demerit point. "Riyan admitted to the offence and accepted the sanction imposed by the Match Referee, Amit Sharma," said the IPL in a statement.

"The BCCI is also exploring other options to initiate proceedings for stringent action against the erring team, its officials and players to ensure that the reputation of IPL remains intact," the statement

added. When PTI reached out to BCCI secretary Devajit Saika on possible action on Rajasthan Royals, he said: "As it is written clearly in the statement, we are exploring what action to take on the team. It is not decided yet."

The Indian government had banned e-cigarettes back in 2019, prohibiting their production, sale and distribution. As per the law, the offender faces imprisonment up to one year and/or a Rs one lakh fine for a first time offence.

"Article 2.21 of IPL Code of Conduct is intended to cover all types of conduct that bring the game into disrepute and which is not specifically and adequately covered by the specific offences set out elsewhere in this Code of Conduct, including Article 2.20," the IPL Code of Conduct states.

"By way of example, Article 2.21 may (depending upon the seriousness and context of the breach) prohibit, without limitation, the following: (a) public acts of misconduct; (b) unruly public behaviour; and (c) inappropriate comments which are detrimental to the interests of the game. (PTI)

## Playing one format affects rhythm but Ro-Ko will manage: Dhawan

**NEW DELHI, April 30:** Having himself been an ODI-only player towards the end of his career, Shikhar Dhawan understands how lack of match frequency can disrupt rhythm but feels it won't be an issue for Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli as they will have enough games under their belt heading into the 2027 World Cup.

Drawing from his own experience of transitioning into a one-format regular, Dhawan acknowledged that reduced match frequency can disrupt a player's flow.

"Yes, when you play one format at the international level, your flow does get disrupted," Dhawan told PTI during an interview.

"So players focus on fitness because you are not playing too many games. You are talking about Rohit and Virat and they are

matured individuals. It is a challenge but they know how to convert challenge into an opportunity.

"If you look at their fitness, Virat was always fit but Rohit has undergone tremendous transformation," the man with nearly 7000 ODI runs said.

Reflecting on how scheduling dynamics shape preparation, he pointed out that the lead-up to the next ODI World Cup will offer ample opportunities for the senior duo to be in rhythm.

"Now with 2027 WC round the corner, they will get to play a lot of ODI matches. If you

look at the time when I became a one-format player, there were back to back T20 World Cups (2021 and 22) and I was playing ODIs which were few and far between. So matches won't be a problem for Rohit and

Virat and there's enough time for the event."

Turning his attention to emerging talent, Dhawan stressed that performances at the highest level should outweigh concerns about age, citing the fearless approach of young Vaibhav Sooryavanshi.

"If Vaibhav is doing brilliantly at the senior level then that has to be counted and not his age. Yes he is a kid but its astonishing the way he hits Bumrah and Arshdeep for such huge sixes.

"A lot of big guns haven't done what he has at such small age. Obviously his time will come. It's bound to come."

He underlined the difficulty of breaking into a settled top order, drawing parallels with his own long stint alongside Rohit and Kohli.

"Look if top order is doing well you can't readily replace them. When me Ro and Virat were playing, we nearly played for a decade and it wasn't easy to replace us.

"It is up to the individual how they take it. It can pinch you a bit but one shouldn't be disheartened if the chance doesn't come along readily. Vaibhav has so much blessings at this young age." (PTI)



eyes open. (They are forced to think) 'oh, it's spinning and I'm missing it'."

Muralitharan continued, "It's very difficult to teach (spin bowling). It has to come from them. But there are all coming in at

the age of professional level. When you come one level higher, you have to improve their game. So some people do, some people go down so it's very difficult to come here in the IPL and improve spinners."

When asked how he and Australian legend Shane Warne would approach such a scenario of batting-dominated game, Muralitharan said they would not have been so expensive.

"See, we would have turned the ball but we would have not made a big dent. We could have got like one or two wickets maybe. They would (still) have scored 40 runs (off us) easily because wickets are so good," he said.

"Shane Warne was also a freak because he could spin the ball and he could do wonders. (But) the game has changed. We can't compare eras. The way the players bat, the mentality of the players... these are the things that have changed."

"We can't think about the past. Okay, we are greats from our time but now these people are greats because that is the way the game has gone," he added.

Muralitharan said producing fair wickets is the only way to balance the competition between bat and the ball.

"If we can give fair wickets... but then the spectators will be bored. Cricket followers and cricketers who are very young; the 20-20 followers are very entertainment (oriented). They want to see fours and sixes so that is why the tournament is built like that and (with that) extra player to come and bat and not (let teams) go (for) lower scores," he said.

"It's an entertainment. This is not looking (that) you are developing a cricketer or not. It is a big business at the moment, right? Sponsors and everything..." Muralitharan said, adding that the bowlers would be able to catch-up in a season or two. (PTI)